

BAUCUM, NATALIE JENEE, Ph.D. A Critical Analysis of How Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence, Social Comparison and Ethnic Identification Influences Consumers' Status Consumption, Desire for Unique Products and Preference for Prominent Brand Markings. (2017)  
Directed by Dr. Byoungho Jin. 202pp.

Brand prominence refers to the brand markings (e.g., company name, slogan, logo, sounds or colors) that visually identify a company, its products or services (Truex, 2016). A relatively new concept to consumer research, one of the goals of this dissertation was to establish a theoretical framework that examines the social-psychological and consumer behavior factors that influence consumers' preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM). Reference group theory and social comparison theory were used to create the theoretical framework. The other goal of this study was to examine if a person's identification with his/her ethnic origin has any impact on their consumption behavior.

To accomplish these research goals, first a CPPBM measurement was created and tested since no standing measurement existed. Results showed the CPPBM scale has three dimensions (i.e., high, low and no preference for prominent brand markings) and eight measurement items. The finalized CPPBM measurement was then combined into the full survey.

The full survey was pre-tested and revised before being disseminated via an online survey URL created in Qualtrics using convenience sampling. The proposed theoretical framework was tested using surveys collected from 594 consumers of African descent (i.e., participants self-identified as African American, Black and Caribbean)

living in the United States. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the framework.

Results of the analyses showed the following factors had a direct and indirect influence on the brand markings consumers choose: normative consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII), informational CSII, social comparison orientation, status consumption and desire for unique consumer products. Informational CSII had a positive effect on status consumption while normative CSII had a negative effect on the concept. Social comparison orientation had a positive effect on status consumption as well as desire for unique consumer products. In terms of which factors directly influenced CPPBM, findings showed normative CSII, status consumption and desire for unique consumer products to impact CPPBM. Post-hoc analyses showed status consumption had the strongest influence on high preference for prominent brand markings while desire for unique consumer products had the strongest influence on low preference for prominent brand markings.

The last results were related to how much does a person's commitment to and exploration of their ethnic origin (i.e., ethnic identity) impact their consumption behavior. Findings showed ethnic identity to moderate the relationships between normative CSII (i.e., positive effect), informational CSII (i.e., negative effect) and status consumption confirming its effect on consumer behavior. Ethnic identity also had a direct, negative effect on status consumption.

The academic understanding of brand prominence was extended in this study by empirically confirming a theoretical framework that explains why consumers prefer

certain levels of brand markings. An academic understanding of how a person's self-identification, commitment to and exploration of their ethnic origin (i.e., ethnic identity) influences their consumption of status goods was also discovered in this study. In addition to findings being discussed, theoretical and managerial implications are provided as well as suggestions for future research.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HOW SUSCEPTIBILITY TO INTERPERSONAL  
INFLUENCE, SOCIAL COMPARISON AND ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION  
INFLUENCES CONSUMERS' STATUS CONSUMPTION,  
DESIRE FOR UNIQUE PRODUCTS AND  
PREFERENCE FOR PROMINENT  
BRAND MARKINGS

by

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to the warriors in my life who have battled illness while completing my PhD: Yvette Leathers, Mother; Jackie Grady, Aunt; James Barnes Sr, Uncle; Oscar Dorsey, Uncle; Ryan Kerr, Best Friend. I also dedicate my work to my loved ones I've lost on this journey: William Leathers, Father; Billy Baucum, Uncle; Mary Boston, Aunt; Deloris Smith, Cousin; Virginia Baucum, Grandmother; Harold Moore, Great Uncle; Yvette Foster, Sister; Malcolm Grady, Uncle.

## APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

While there is a plethora of research on brands and branding, the question of what influences consumers to choose certain brand markings (e.g., trademark, unique design features, etc.) still remains. We know from Han, Nunes, and Dreze (2010) that consumers use brand markings to associate and/or dissociate themselves from different groups of consumers. However, we do not know if/how their social groups impact their preferences for brand markings. Therefore, one of this study's goals is to establish and empirically confirm a conceptual framework that examines a relatively new concept in consumer research called consumer preference for prominent brand markings. Using this framework, the study will answer the following questions: What influence do social groups have on a person's consumption of goods that help them display their status and uniqueness? And how does consumption of these goods influence their choice of brand marking(s)?

Another goal of this study is to examine if a person's identification with their ethnic origin impacts their consumption behavior. As of June 2017, the United States (U.S.) has over 325 million residents (United States Census Bureau, 2017); 38% of them are not White (Nielsen, 2015a). This 38% is comprised of Asians, Blacks, Hispanic/Latino and all other multi-ethnic residents who are projected to be the numeric majority by 2044 with an astounding buying power of \$3.4 trillion in 2014 alone

(Nielsen, 2015a). The purchasing power of these groups has largely been ignored in advertisements because many companies are leery of offending Whites who used to be the ethnic majority in the U.S. (Alaniz & Gilly, 1986; Meyers, 2011; Selig, 2010). With the rate of immigration increasing every day and the Asian, Black and Hispanic populations growing six times faster than the White population (Chattalas & Harper, 2007), consumer research that examines ethnic differences within the U.S. market is necessary.

In a multicultural society like the U.S., not understanding the potential effect consumers' ethnicity has on their consumption behavior could possibly lead to missed opportunities to attract new customers and maintain relationships with current customers. Just because a person was born into a certain ethnic group does not mean they will stay committed to the group's cultural values, norms and traditions throughout their life. Hence, the following questions were created: how much does a person identifying with their ethnic origin influence their decision to consume and display status goods? With these two research goals in mind, Chapter I includes the following sections: 1) Background, 2) Gaps in Research, 3) Purpose of the Study, 4) Significance of the Study, 5) Definition of Key Terms and Acronyms and 6) Outline of Study.

## **Background**

### **Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings**

As stated previously, one of the main goals of this dissertation is to establish a conceptual framework that examines consumer preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM). The concept was adapted from Han et al.'s (2010) concept called brand



prominence. Brand prominence is described as using brand markings on products to determine the brand's overall level of conspicuousness. The term has also been used in previous studies to describe consumer recollection of a brand (Cauberghe & De Pelsmacker, 2010; Grohs, Wagner, & Vsetecka, 2004; Johar & Pham, 1999; Wakefield, Becker-Olsen, & Cornwell, 2006) and consumer brand attachment (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010). Because of the conflicting meanings in previous consumer research, this dissertation renames brand prominence as "consumer preference for prominent brand markings" (CPPBM) to lessen confusion around meaning of the concept. The term "brand marking" in this dissertation is used to describe "any combination of a name, slogan, logo, sounds or colors that visually identify a company, its products or services" (Truex, 2016).

Consumer preference for prominent brand markings has two components. One part of the concept describes a business strategy used by companies where they place different kinds of brand markings on products to appeal to different customer segments. Brand markings placed on the outside of the product are typically targeted towards customers who have a high need to signal their status (Han et al., 2010). Examples (see Figure 1) of companies using a *highly* prominent brand marking strategy are: the Nike name and Swoosh symbol; and Chanel's name and interlocking Cs symbol.



*Figure 1. Examples of Companies Using High Prominent Brand Markings.* Illustration credit: Lauren Flaggs.

Companies also use less (i.e., low) prominent brand marking strategies to appeal to customers with a low need to display their status (Han et al., 2010). Companies using this business strategy typically place prominent brand markings (i.e., name logo, symbol logo) inside the product, and/or use less prominent markings such as color(s), material(s), and pattern(s) to mark the outside of the product. Examples (see Figure 2) are Bottega Veneta's weave pattern on its leather products, Christian Louboutin's red sole bottoms and Missoni's colorful motifs and use of knitwear. Companies like these have a strict "no logo" strategy to make their goods unrecognizable to the casual observer and identifiable only to those "in the know" (Han et al., 2010). It should be noted an item low in prominence can become high in prominence once the mass consumer population recognizes the brand marking(s) and begins to purchase them.



*Figure 2. Examples of Companies Using Low Prominent Brand Markings.* Illustration credit: Lauren Flaggs.

There are also companies like Gucci and Louis Vuitton that create two product lines; one product line has brand markings placed on the outside of items (i.e., high brand prominence) and another product line has no brand visible brand markings on the outside of items (i.e., low brand prominence) (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3. Examples of Companies Using High and Low Prominent Brand Markings.* Illustration credit: Lauren Flaggs.

The second part of consumer preference for prominent brand markings describes the status signaling intentions of consumers. Han et al. (2010) proposed a model of status signaling using prominent brand markings. The study concluded there were socioeconomic differences in a person's need for status and use of brand markings. Wealthy consumers with a high need for status used highly prominent brand markings to distinguish themselves from those who are less wealthy. Consumers who could not afford luxury but still had a high need for status tried to emulate the wealthy using counterfeit luxury goods with prominent brand markings. Wealthy consumers with a low need for status used low prominent brand markings to associate with other wealthy consumers. The study concluded prominent brand markings are used by consumers to display and signal wealth and/or status whether it is actual or implied.

### **Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence and Social Comparison**

#### **Orientation**

After thoroughly examining the small body of literature on consumer preference for prominent brand markings, two theoretical concepts from social psychology literature were incorporated into the conceptual framework of this dissertation. Specifically, consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII) and social comparison orientation (SCO) were chosen because both concepts are useful in explaining why consumers use products and brands to associate or disassociate with similar or dissimilar others. CSII is derived from McGuire's (1968) susceptibility to interpersonal influence which demonstrated individuals differ in how they respond to social influences (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989). CSII has two dimensions; normative and informational

interpersonal influence. The normative aspects of CSII focuses on a person acquiring and using products and brands to satisfy their need to identify or conform with, and/or enhance their image with others who are significant to them. For example, a man notices his coworkers are wearing Ralph Lauren dress shirts by the polo player riding on a horse symbol on the outside (i.e., highly prominent brand marking). He decides to purchase Ralph Lauren dress shirts for one or more of the following reasons: to avoid being excluded from the group, to be rewarded and/or to be accepted by the group.

The focus of informational CSII is different from the normative aspects of CSII in that significant others are not included. Informational CSII focuses on a person seeking information from others in order to learn about products and brands they are considering purchasing. For example, a woman goes shopping for a pair of shoes to match the dresses she has purchased for her upcoming job interviews. Buying formal shoes is not a regular purchase for her so she depends on the sales associate to advise her on what shoes are best to wear to a job interview. The sales associate, being an expert on various shoe brands and types, picks and presents options to the woman and she eventually chooses a pair of shoes the sales associate has suggested. CSII is being used in this study to connect consumer preference for prominent brand markings to a theoretical framework and examine its effects on a consumer's consumption of status goods.

The other theoretical concept incorporated into this dissertation, social comparison orientation (SCO), is different from CSII in that SCO is an internal comparison of one's self to others and CSII is based on external influences. SCO examines two types of comparisons. The first type of social comparison is where a

person compares and evaluates their *abilities* to others (Festinger, 1954; Gibbons & B. Buunk, 1999). An example of an ability comparison is a female college student from a low-to-middle socioeconomic demographic comparing her ability to purchase a Gucci purse she sees a group of wealthier girls at her college carrying. She sees the Gucci purse as a way to identify with the wealthy girls but unfortunately, her financial situation does not allow her to make the purchase. The second type of social comparison is based on a person comparing and evaluating their *opinions* to others (Festinger, 1954; Gibbons & B. Buunk, 1999). For example, one person shares with their friend they prefer products with no semblance of the brand because they want to show their uniqueness. The friend receiving this information evaluates it and compares this opinion about brand markings to their own beliefs. The friend receiving the information either agrees or disagrees with their friend about their preference for brand markings. SCO is being used in this study to connect consumer preference for prominent brand markings to a theoretical framework and evaluate its effects on a consumer's desire for unique products.

### **Status Consumption and Desire for Unique Consumer Products**

Han et al. (2010) state a person's brand marking preferences are based on their desire to signal their status. Socially visible goods consumed by individuals are often associated with their social standing (i.e., social status) (Chao & Schor, 1998). For example, a woman spends \$200 an ounce for a lipstick even though there is a comparable equivalent that is \$5 an ounce. She spends the extra \$195 on the lipstick in order to maintain her social status in a current group, to gain recognition from a group she aspires to be a part of, or to separate from others she does not want to associate or be associated

with. Status consumption (SC) was incorporated into the conceptual framework of this dissertation based on Han et al. (2010) establishing a person's desire for status goods has an influence on their preferences for prominent brand markings.

Just as a person can use their possessions to show their social status, they can also use them to show their uniqueness. A person's need for uniqueness is normally engrained in their desire to dissociate from a person or group of persons. The need to be unique stems from the need to dispel a negative stereotype of some sort or to show their differentness from others. People with a strong need for uniqueness will desire and choose products that help them achieve the perception of being different from others. The desire for unique consumer products (DUCP) concept is being incorporated into this study to ascertain how a person's preference for prominent brand markings allows them to display their uniqueness.

### **Ethnic Identity**

A person's interpersonal relationships are a factor in how much they identify with their ethnic group (Forney, 1981). Identifying with one's ethnic group is called ethnic identity (EI). It is assumed one of a person's interpersonal influences is their ethnic group based on the influence family members and community at large has on a person when they are young (Forney, 1981). If the majority of a person's interpersonal relationships exist within their ethnic group, then they are more likely to retain their EI. However, if a person establishes more interpersonal relationships outside of their ethnic group, then they are less likely to retain their EI. For example, a first generation immigrant from a non U.S. country who moves to the U.S. is more likely to develop

interpersonal relationships within their ethnic group thereby maintaining their EI. This may change though when the first generation immigrant expands his/her family. Future generations of this first generation immigrant are more likely to develop interpersonal relationships outside of their ethnic community leading to decreased EI (Forney, 1981).

This concept is still relatively new to consumer research. Previous consumer studies that incorporated EI have treated ethnic groups as homogenous neglecting to conduct a thorough examination of how much or how little a person identifying with their ethnic group has a major influence on their consumption behavior. Eighty percent of the people living in the U.S. claim ethnic ancestry from one of the 105 ethnicities within the U.S. alone (Mich & Keillor, 2011). This fact makes it difficult to homogenize the entire population and say all U.S. consumers have the same consumption behaviors. Mich and Keillor (2011) discuss how complex EI is. They state EI includes those who identify with “1) the ethnic culture (ethnic), 2) the host culture (assimilated), 3) both cultures (bicultural) or 4) either culture (marginalizers)” (Mich & Keillor, 2011, p. 3). This complexity of EI demonstrates companies cannot use one over-arching segmentation strategy when operating in a multi-ethnic market like the U.S. While academic consumer research lags in understanding how EI impacts consumption behavior, there are a few companies recognizing the need to have different product lines and marketing strategies that appeal to a wide variety of ethnic consumers. For example, Gucci created the Dionysus City bag (see Figure 4) with different ethnic motifs to appeal to Middle Eastern, Japanese and Chinese consumers (Gucci, 2016; Rajvanshi, 2016). However, more companies need to follow this type of product and marketing strategy if they want



to appeal to a wider audience and expand their consumer base thereby increasing sales revenue. Assuming a person's ethnic group is one of their interpersonal influences, this study was created to understand how much a person's ethnic identification with their ethnic origin influences their consumption of status goods.



*Figure 4. Examples of Ethnic Motifs on Gucci's Dionysus City Bag. Illustration credit: Lauren Flaggs.*

### **Gaps in Research**

The research design of this dissertation was developed based on several gaps found in consumer literature. First, research on the brand prominence concept thus far has shown consumers do have a preference for prominent brand markings. However, antecedents of consumers' preference for prominent brand markings have been largely underexplored. Although previous literature has discovered many social and psychological factors related to brand preferences, the degree of preference for a prominent brand marking is still unclear. An integrative research framework was built using social psychology theories to holistically explain consumers' degree of preference for prominent brand markings. Understanding how much prominence a consumer prefers

in a brand marking is an important, yet missing component of brand management.

Answering this question will enable companies to devise branding strategies that create products and product lines with brand markings that better align with consumers' preferences.

A second research gap found there is no standing measurement of consumer preference for prominent brand markings. Previous studies measured the concept by showing participants pictures with and without the brand name (Han et al., 2010), large vs. small logo (Han et al., 2010), with vs. without company logo (Schulz & Schulz, 2012), abbreviated vs. full logo (Schulz & Schulz, 2012), and one logo vs. repetitive logo (Schulz & Schulz, 2012). Using pictures, participants were requested to choose the picture with the brand marking they preferred the most. While this research approach identified certain conditions in which consumers preferred prominent brand markings, the approach is limited because it was largely experimental. The experimental approach did not examine the degree of prominence or effects of antecedents on brand marking preferences. The absence of a scale is a critical gap in brand prominence research because without it, consumers' degree of preference for prominent brand markings and factors associated to the concept cannot be properly examined.

The third gap this dissertation will fill is it extends the exploration of consumer preference for prominent brand markings beyond the luxury market. Current research (Chen, Zhu, Le, & Wu, 2014; Han et al., 2010; Schulz & Schulz, 2012; Thwaites & Ferguson, 2012) has only examined consumers' preference for brand markings only on luxury products. However, it is the current business norm to create branding for all mass

consumer products as well. Therefore, it is important to begin examining consumer preference for prominent brand markings in all product categories in order to create a full understanding of consumer behavior in this area.

Fourth, while initial consumer research assumed consumers from the same ethnic background shared similar consumption patterns, more recent research is beginning to show consumers from the same ethnic background actually have different consumption patterns (Williams & Grantham, 1999). This supports industry reports that warn marketers against their continuous strategy of treating members of the same ethnic group as one homogenous consumer group (Nielsen, 2015a). A gap in literature will be filled by examining what impact ethnicity has on consumption behavior using the ethnic identity concept. The author of this study believes the ethnic identity concept will lead to a better understanding of how ethnicity influences consumption behavior because it combines racial identification with measuring a consumer's commitment to their ethnic group as well as measuring a consumer's devotion to learning about their ethnic group. The dissertation also responds to a call for consumer research to understand how ethnicity impacts a person's consumption behavior beyond the realm of racial identification.

Fifth, consumer research has shown reference groups influence (i.e., normative) consumers' consumption behaviors (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Sen, Gurhan-Canli, & Morwitz, 2001). They also accept product information (i.e., informational) from interpersonal sources (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Murali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005). However, research has tended to assume normative interpersonal influence has a stronger

influence than informational interpersonal influence on status consumption thereby not always including both dimensions of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence in studies. This dissertation was designed to help determine the level of impact both dimensions of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence have on status consumption.

Sixth, review of the literature found individual consumers compare themselves to similar and dissimilar others when making purchases (Dreze & Nunes, 2009; Nichols & Schumann, 2012; Smeesters, Mussweiler, & Mandel, 2010). However, what is not clear and is important to learn is to what extent a consumer's comparison behavior impacts their consumption of status goods. While consumer research has mostly focused on consumers who frequently compare themselves to others, little research exists examining the impact social comparison has on consumers' consumption behavior. Social comparison research has shown people do not always compare themselves with similar others. In fact, there are certain social conditions in which people purposely choose to disassociate themselves from similar others. Based on this theoretical knowledge, this dissertation was created to add to the body of literature by examining the positive (i.e., similar others) and negative (i.e., dissimilar others) effects of social comparison on consumers' desire for unique products.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Filling the research gaps identified above, the primary purpose of this dissertation is to explain consumers' degree of preference for prominent brand markings using a proposed framework that combines the following social psychology theories, factors and

consumption processes: social psychology theories (i.e., reference group theory and social comparison theory), consumer group influences (i.e., normative CSII and informational CSII), comparison influences (i.e., social comparison orientation), and consumption behaviors (i.e., status consumption and desire for unique consumer products). By empirically testing the proposed research model, an aim of this study is to discover how social groups and comparisons to others influence a person's consumption of goods. Specifically, the researcher seeks to unearth how a person's desire to increase their status or uniqueness leads them to choose goods with brand markings that allow them to display their desired level of status or uniqueness.

### **Significance of the Study**

This dissertation was designed to provide several contributions to consumer behavior literature in addition to literature on brand prominence. First, this empirical study will clearly show how social psychological factors influence consumer preferences for prominent brand markings. Specifically, an aim of this study is to show there are variations in levels of preference for prominent brand markings. To show these variations in levels of preference, the researcher created a measurement which is believed to be the first of its kind. The measurement provides academic and marketing researchers the ability to understand *individual* differences in preferences for prominent brand markings. The knowledge gained will allow companies to customize product offerings on an individual level which leads to increased customer satisfaction.

The second contribution of this study to consumer research is examining consumer preference for brand markings of all product types; not just luxury as previous

research has done. Since this study is designed to understand the underlying social psychological reasons for consumers' preference for prominent brand markings, marketers can use the results to understand the social psychological impact all brands have beyond price points. The third contribution of this study is it will provide better insight into the degree ethnicity has on consumption behavior by using the ethnic identity concept. Outcomes of this study will help companies and scholars identify the impact of ethnic identity in the context of consumerism. Using ethnic identity will advance consumer research from previous self-identification of race to understanding how the degree in which a person identifies with their ethnic origin impacts their consumption behavior. The fifth contribution of this dissertation is a better understanding of how an individual consumer's consumption of status or unique products is related to their preference for prominent brand markings. The findings of this study can help companies create products with different levels of brand markings that directly align with a consumer's desire for status or uniqueness.

### **Definition of Key Terms and Acronyms**

The following table provides definitions of key terms and their acronyms used throughout this dissertation proposal.

Table 1

*Definition of Key Terms and Acronyms*

Key Term	Definition
<b>Asian</b>	A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam. It includes people who indicate their race as "Asian Indian," "Chinese," "Filipino," "Korean," "Japanese," "Vietnamese," and "Other Asian" or provide other detailed Asian responses (United States Census Bureau, 2016a).
<b>Black or African American</b>	“A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as ‘Black, African Am., or Negro’; or report entries such as African American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian” (United States Census Bureau, 2016b).
<b>Brand marking</b>	“Any combination of a name, slogan, logo, sounds or colors that visually identify a company, its products or services” (Truex, 2016).
<b>Consumer preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM)</b>	A consumer’s preference for or tendency to purchase a product with any combination of a name, slogan, logo, colors, material and any other design features that enables them to visually distinguish themselves from others. There are three dimensions of CPPBM; high, low and no. Consumers with a high preference for prominent brand markings are more attracted to products with brand markings on the outside of the item. Consumers with a low preference for prominent brand markings are more attracted to products with no brand marking on the outside of the item. They are more attracted to products that have discrete brand markings not noticeable to the general public. Consumers with no preference for prominent brand markings do not like products with any brand markings (created by author of dissertation).

<b>Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII)</b>	The need to identify with or enhance one's image in the opinion of significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and/or the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others or seeking information from others (Bearden et al., 1989, p. 473).
<b>Consumers of African descent</b>	Consumers who self-identified in this dissertation as either African-American, Black or Caribbean.
<b>Desire for unique consumer products (DUCP)</b>	A sub-item of need for uniqueness (Kang & Kim, 2012) that measures consumers' consumption of products in order to display they are unique from others.
<b>Dissimilar other</b>	A person/group an individual does not feel he/she shares the same attribute(s) with.
<b>Dominant group</b>	The group holding majority power in a society and sets the pattern of living for all other peoples, even those who are not of the dominant group. Within the context of this dissertation study, dominant group refers to those who are of a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant background (Forney, 1981).
<b>Ethnic group</b>	A group of people who share common characteristics such as ancestry, language, culture, religion, beliefs and customs (Forney, 1981).
<b>Ethnic identity</b>	Measures how much a person self-identifies, explores and is committed to their ethnic group.
<b>Ethnicity</b>	A social construct used to describe a person's cultural background.
<b>Hispanic/Latino(a)</b>	The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requires federal agencies to use a minimum of two ethnicities in collecting and reporting data: Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. OMB defines "Hispanic or Latino" as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. People who identify with the terms "Hispanic" or "Latino" are those who classify themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the decennial census questionnaire and various Census Bureau survey questionnaires – "Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano" or "Puerto Rican" or "Cuban" – as well as those who indicate that they are "another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin" (United States Census Bureau, 2015b).



<b>Informational consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (informational CSII)</b>	“The tendency to learn about products and services by observing others or seeking information from others” (Bearden et al., 1989, p. 473).
<b>Interpersonal influence</b>	A type of social influence that occurs when group members strongly encourage or force a person to conform to group norms and behaviors.
<b>Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement (MEIM)</b>	Original scale developed by Phinney (1992) to measure the strength of an individual’s ethnic identity.
<b>Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement-Revised (MEIM-R)</b>	A revised version of MEIM created by Phinney & Ong (2007).
<b>Normative consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (normative CSII)</b>	“The need to identify with or enhance one's image in the opinion of significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands and the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions” (Bearden et al., 1989, p. 473).
<b>Race</b>	A social construct that labels people based on physical and socioeconomic-status differences.
<b>Reference group</b>	Formal and informal groups an individual uses as a standard in forming and evaluating attitudes and behaviors.
<b>Similar other</b>	A person/group an individual sees himself/herself as sharing the same attribute(s).
<b>Social comparison</b>	The act of a person comparing their abilities and opinions to others.
<b>Social comparison orientation (SCO)</b>	A measurement created by Gibbons and B. Buunk (1999) that examines individual differences in the social comparison process. SCO includes both aspects of Festinger’s (1954) definition of social comparison—abilities and opinions. SCO is also known as the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM).
<b>Social psychology</b>	The branch of psychology that deals with social interactions, including their origins and their effects on the individual.
<b>Status consumption (SC)</b>	“The interest a consumer has to improve one’s social and/or self-standing through consumption of consumer products that may be conspicuous and that confer and symbolize status for the individual and surrounding significant others” (Eastman & Eastman, 2015, p. 3).
<b>Status goods</b>	Goods which act as status symbols, signaling their owners' high social standing within society (Investopedia, 2016).

<b>Two or more races, Biracial or Multiracial</b>	People who choose to provide two or more races either by checking two or more race response check boxes, by providing multiple responses, or by some combination of check boxes and other responses (United States Census Bureau, 2016c).
<b>White</b>	A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as "White" or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian (United States Census Bureau, 2016c).

### **Outline of Study**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter I provides an outline of the dissertation. It presents background of the research topic, the problem, research gaps in previous literature, purpose and objectives of the study, and the study's significance. Key terms and acronyms used throughout the study are also defined in Chapter I. Chapter II lays a theoretical foundation for the study and presents literature related to the study's purpose. The conceptual framework and hypotheses are also presented in this chapter. Chapter III describes the methodology used in the study. It covers the sample population, how data was collected, thorough descriptions of survey instrument development, pre-test of full survey and types of data analyses conducted. Chapter IV reports the results of the study, and Chapter V discusses the results as well as provides implications (i.e., theoretical and managerial), limitations and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter II consists of several parts. First, the chapter will introduce and discuss the theoretical foundation created to substantiate this study's premise of uncovering consumer preference for prominent brand markings. Next is a discussion of the major constructs (i.e., consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence, social comparison orientation, status consumption, desire for unique consumer products, consumer preference for prominent brand markings and ethnic identity) that are linked to the theoretical foundation. Lastly, a conceptual research framework along with corresponding hypotheses is proposed.

#### **Theoretical Foundation**

Two of the concepts used in this dissertation come from the following theories: reference group theory and social comparison theory. This section discusses these theories to establish a theoretical foundation for this dissertation. The theories were chosen because the major constructs being used to establish the theoretical foundation in this study were derived from them.

#### **Reference Group Theory**

Group interaction is an important component of a person's self-identity because the interaction impacts attitude formation and attitude change (Stafford, 1966). Another term for group interaction is "reference group" and is defined as a person or group of

people that have significant influence over a person's behavior (Hyman, 1942, 1960). Social psychological research has divided reference groups into three types. The first type of reference group is that of which a person currently belongs (i.e., membership group). The function of membership groups is considered by researchers as normative (Cocanongher & Bruce, 1971; Hyman, 1960). The normative function of reference groups sets and enforces the standards (i.e., group norms) individual group members must abide by (Cocanongher & Bruce, 1971). The normative function of group membership typically influences an individual's conformity/nonconformity or contentment/discontentment behavior (Stafford, 1966). Individuals engage in these behaviors in order to avoid punishment or receive a reward. It should be noted reference groups that function in the normative realm are also commonly referred to as "informal groups" or "close referents".

The second type of reference group is one that awakens the aspirational desires of individuals (i.e., aspirational group) (Stafford, 1966). For example, if an individual perceives others as more well off (e.g., wealthier, more educated, drive a better car, live in a better house, etc.), they may aspire to better and satisfy themselves while decreasing self-frustration. The third type of reference group is one where a person purposely separates themselves from others (i.e., dissociative group). The function of aspirational and dissociative groups is called comparative (Cocanongher & Bruce, 1971; Hyman, 1960). In the comparative function, the individual is not required to have direct or significant interaction with the aspirational or dissociative group. The group(s) "serve as a point of comparison against which an individual can evaluate him/herself and others"

(Cocanongher & Bruce, 1971, p. 379; Stafford, 1966). The comparative function leads to evaluation behavior where a person naturally assesses or analyzes their norms, values, status and behavior against others they want to associate/dissociate with.

In addition to dissecting the nuances of reference groups, it is also important to understand the dimensions of reference behavior which are all interrelated and can play out in different forms of behavior. The first of the three dimensions of reference behavior is “knowledge”. In the “knowledge” dimension, an individual must be aware of the group’s existence, learn its norms and values, observe how it is structured according to status and corresponding behavior patterns (Stanford, 1966). The second dimension, “sanctions”, refers to the fact that a person can have several reference groups. In other words, reference groups are not limited to those to which the person belongs. Also, it is possible for a person’s decisions to involve the opinions of many referents. However, the number of referents depends upon the size or importance of the decision. The referent can be a source of positive sanctions (e.g., rewards) or negative sanctions (e.g., punishment) and is used to evaluate the individual’s norms, status and behavior. The third dimension is “affectivity”. “Affectivity” relates to how much a person identifies with a reference group. A person’s degree of identification with a reference group is important to understand how groups influence the behavior of individual members (Stanford, 1966).

As one can see, reference groups are very complex. This is due to the fact that reference group theory has seven determinants, each exploring a different aspect of how groups impact human behavior. The theory “aims to systematize the determinants and

consequences of those processes of evaluation and self-appraisal in which the individual takes the values or standards of other individuals and groups as a comparative frame of reference” (Hyman, 1960, p. 387). The seven determinants are 1) dimensions of reference behavior, 2) bases of social power, 3) susceptibility of individuals to group influence, 4) reference group relevance to a particular decision, 5) group cohesiveness, 6) attraction of an individual to group and 7) status of group (Webster & Faircloth III, 1994; Witt, 1969). The susceptibility of individuals to group influence determinant is being used in this dissertation because one of the objectives is to examine how groups impact individual consumption behavior. It should be mentioned susceptibility of individuals to group influence in theoretical and consumer research is also referred to as “group influence”, “interpersonal influence”, “interpersonal social influence” and “susceptibility to interpersonal influence”. The term “susceptibility to interpersonal influence” will be used in this study.

**Susceptibility to interpersonal influence.** The susceptibility to interpersonal influence determinant was created from the normative and comparative functions of reference groups. This determinant refers to the normative function of reference groups as normative interpersonal influence. Normative interpersonal influencers are reference groups individuals are most likely current members of. In normative interpersonal influence, the relationship between an individual and reference groups is considered informal. Informal groups are unstructured with individual members sharing common interests and goals, having close relationships and frequent interaction with each other.

Examples of informal reference groups are families, peer groups, people of the same ethnicity, a group of ballerinas, a group of marketing PhD students, etc.

The comparative function of reference groups was renamed and is referred to as informational interpersonal influence by the susceptibility to interpersonal influence determinant. Informational interpersonal influencers are typically groups or persons an individual has no direct relationship with. Although these influencers are socially distant from the individual, they can serve as examples of aspiration (e.g., celebrities, athletes, social media personalities, etc.) or dissociation (e.g., drug dealers, college dropout, lower class/status, etc.). The individual bases their behavior on information from observing a comparative other or by seeking advice from a comparative other who the individual feels is an expert.

When a review of consumer literature was conducted, consumer studies were found using the original reference group determinant, susceptibility to interpersonal influence. A few studies concluded informal reference groups (i.e., normative susceptibility to interpersonal influence) do influence an individual group member's product (Witt & Bruce, 1970, 1972) and/or brand choice (Reingen, Foster, Brown, & Seidman, 1984; Stafford, 1966; Witt, 1969; Witt & Bruce, 1970, 1972). Moschis (1976) concluded a high degree of similarity between the individual and group members must be present in order for group members to have a significant influence on an individual's purchase behavior. Park and Lessig (1977) found student consumers were more influenced by their peers than housewives were by their peers. Susceptibility to interpersonal influence was also used to examine group influence on types of products.

Ford and Ellis (1980) found products low in visibility, complexity, perceived risk and high testability were less susceptible to interpersonal influence than products high in visibility, complexity, perceived risk and low in testability. Bearden and Etzel (1982) found group influence to vary between publicly and privately consumed products as well as luxury and necessity products.

Most consumer research conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s only examined the influence of informal reference groups. Cocanougher and Bruce (1971) saw a gap in the literature and studied the influence socially distant referents (i.e., informational susceptibility to interpersonal influence) had on consumer behavior. They concluded the amount of influence a socially distant referent has on an individual depends on the individual's attitude towards aspiring to be like the socially distant referent. As one can see, initial research using the reference group determinant, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, was sparse yet insightful. This body of research shows the effectiveness of using reference group theory and its determinant susceptibility to interpersonal influence to examine consumer behavior; hence, the reason for the author adopting the theory and its associated determinant for this dissertation. It should be noted here the susceptibility to interpersonal influence determinant created by McGuire (1968) was adopted and revised by Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989) to better fit the parameters of consumption. A discussion of how the determinant was revised will be discussed in the "Literature Review of the Constructs" section under "Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence".



## Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory, created by Leon Festinger (1954), was derived from reference group theory. Martin and Kennedy (1994) summarized Festinger's (1954) theory into three basic tenants:

1. Individuals are *driven* to evaluate their opinions and abilities.
2. When an *objective* standard of comparison is not available, then individuals will fulfill the need by *socially* comparing themselves with other people.
3. Whenever possible, social comparisons are made with *similar* others.

What drives a person to socially compare themselves to others and/or objects stems from their uncertainty about the self, low self-esteem and an unstable self-concept (Campbell, 1990; Nichols & Schumann, 2012). Initial research studying social comparison identified it as a one-dimensional process meaning it was believed people only made one comparison at a time. It was also believed to be used by individuals to self-evaluate their behaviors(s) (Festinger, 1954; Moschis, 1976; Wood, 1989), and for the comparison to be effective, an individual had to be accurate in their social comparison (Martin & Kennedy, 1994; Wood, 1989).

The second body of social comparison research expands to a formation of steps one person goes through when making social comparisons. Hogg, Bruce, and Hough (1999) took the body of literature and created a visual model of the social comparison process (see Figure 5) based on Wood's (1989) description of the process in his literature review paper. The process begins with a person choosing a motive(s); self-evaluation, self-improvement or self-enhancement. A person can choose more than one motive per

comparison situation. Self-evaluation is defined as an individual's "judgment of value, worth, or appropriateness of his/her abilities, opinions, and personal traits" (Martin & Kennedy, 1994, p. 365). Self-improvement is defined as an individual's "biased attempts to maintain positive views of himself/herself to protect or enhance self-esteem" (Martin & Kennedy, 1994, p. 365). Self-enhancement is defined as an individual's "attempts to learn to improve or to be inspired to improve a particular attribute" (Martin & Kennedy, 1994, p. 366). After a person has chosen their motive(s) for social comparison, he/she then chooses a focal attribute for comparison as well as defines the nature of the focal attribute. For example, if the motivation is self-enhancement, a person who is seeking to understand what power (i.e., focal attribute) looks like may compare the power of the president (i.e., nature of focal attribute) of an organization they are in to the power of general members in the organization.

Next, a person sets the comparison standard and determines surrounding dimensions. For instance, an individual who is motivated by self-improvement chooses wealth as the comparison standard. The surrounding dimensions chosen could be items like amount of money one has, type of neighborhood and house one lives in, type of car one drives and education obtained. After this step, an individual considers related and/or unrelated attributes to the focal attribute. Using the wealth example, related attributes would be notoriety, entrepreneurship, business owner and good with finances. Unrelated attributes would be poor people, subsidized housing and limited education. The next step of the social comparison process is selecting the comparison target or "comparison other". In the wealth example, a target could be Warren Buffet, one of the richest people

in the world. If the individual is fairly wealthy like Buffet, then he would be considered a “similar other”. If the person is not wealthy, then Buffet would be considered a “dissimilar other”.

The comparison target determines the last part of the social comparison process; direction of comparison (i.e., similar, upward or downward). Using the wealth scenario, if the person’s wealth is close to Buffet’s, then the comparison is a *similar comparison*. Similar comparisons are when a person “makes comparisons with others who are similar on the attribute under question or surrounding attributes” (Martin & Kennedy, 1994, p. 366). If the individual is not as wealthy as him, then Buffet is an *upward comparison*. Upward comparisons are “when one makes comparisons with others who are superior or better off in some way” (Martin & Kennedy, 1994, p. 366). On the other hand, the individual could make a *downward comparison* where he/she chooses a person who is less wealthy than they are. Downward comparisons are when a person “makes comparisons with others who are inferior or less fortunate” than them (Martin & Kennedy, 1994, p. 366).



Figure 5. Summary of the Social Comparison Process. Adapted from “Female Images in Advertising: The Implications of Social Comparison for Marketing,” by M. K. Hogg, M. Bruce, and K. Hough, 1999, *International Journal of Advertising*, 18(4), p. 448.

The third body of social comparison research focuses on “comparison mechanisms”. This body of research comes from Mussweiler’s (2003) introduction of the Selective Accessibility Model (SAM) of comparative thinking. SAM states a person may engage in one of two social comparison mechanisms; similarity testing or dissimilarity testing (Mussweiler, 2003; Nichols & Schumann, 2012; Smeesters, Mussweiler, & Mandel, 2010). Similarity testing is when a person “selectively activates information indicating that self and standard are similar and ignores information indicating that they are dissimilar” (Smeesters et al., 2010, p. 931). Dissimilarity testing is when a person “selectively activates information indicating that the self and standard are different and ignores information indicating that they are similar” (Smeesters et al., 2010, p. 931). A person is driven to choose one of these comparison mechanisms based

on their initial assessment of the similarity between the self and the comparison standard. If initial assessment determines the standard resembles the self, then similarity testing is triggered. If initial assessment determines the standard is different from the self, then dissimilarity testing is triggered.

When a review of extant consumer literature was conducted, it was concluded social comparison theory has been used to examine diverse consumer environments (e.g., advertising, materialism, desire for products, consumption of luxury goods, purchase of durable goods, product customization, etc.). The literature also shows an investigation of the different aspects of social comparison (e.g., motives, feelings, types of comparison, testing theory, outcomes, direction, etc.) (see Table 2). As Table 2 shows, social comparison is a complex process and has been proven to have a direct and indirect effect on consumption behavior; thus, its inclusion as a critical component of this dissertation's framework. Specifically, the concept social comparison orientation is chosen to capture how the social comparison process is demonstrated in various types of consumption behaviors. This concept will be discussed in detail in the "Literature Review of Major Constructs" section.

Table 2

*Consumer Studies Using Social Comparison Theory*

<b>Research Themes</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Direction of social comparison	Andersson (2008)	Individuals who make upward social comparisons had a higher concern for their relative consumption than individuals making downward social comparisons.
	Moreau & Herd (2010)	When self-design of products occurred after social comparison, upward social comparison was higher than equivalent social comparison. When social comparison occurred before self-customization, there were no significant differences between the types of social comparison.
	Takhar, Maclaran, Parsons, & Broderick (2010)	The British Sikh community (Indian consumers) compared themselves to the heroes and heroines in the movies (upward comparison).
Effect of similarity and dissimilarity social comparison	Nichols & Schumann (2012)	Dissimilar (aspirational) social comparison was higher when the comparison standard was a symbolic product. Similar (assimilative) social comparison was higher when the comparison standard was a functional product.
	Smeesters, Mussweiler, & Mandel (2010)	The type of comparison depends on the standard of comparison dimension and not the extremity of that position.
Can objects be social comparison targets?	Trampe, Stapel, & Siero (2011)	Under specific circumstances, objects (ex. beauty-enhancing products) can also be social comparison targets.
Antecedents of social comparison	Chan & Prendergast (2008)	Peer communication; Susceptibility to peer influence
	Hogg, Bruce, & Hough (1999); Micu, Coulter, & Price (2009); Richins (1991)	Advertising
	Hogg & Fragou (2003); Martin & Gentry (1997); Martin & Kennedy (1994)	Self-evaluation; Self-improvement

	Irmak, Vallen, & Sen (2010)	Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU)
	Karlsson, Dellgran, Klingander, & Garling (2004)	Household income
	Lin & Tsai (2006)	Frustration; Self-relevance; Self-evaluation; Self-enhancement; Altruism; Common bonds; Self-perception
Consequences of social comparison	Ackerman, MacInnis, & Folkes (2000)	Feelings of embarrassment, envy, anger and happiness
	Argo, White, & Dahl (2006)	Lying
	Chan & Prendergast (2008)	Materialism
	Chan & Sengupta (2013)	Envy
	Dreze & Nunes (2009)	Social status
	Karlsson et al. (2004)	Consumption of luxury goods and services
	Karlsson, Garling, Dellgran, & Klingander (2005)	Purchase decision of durable goods
	Moschis (1976)	Influence on purchase behavior
	Sharma & Alter (2013)	Self-evaluation of financial status
	Takhar et al. (2010)	Social identity
	Wang, Sun, & Song (2011)	Purchase of luxury

### **Literature Review of Major Concepts**

This section presents an overview of the major concepts used to create the conceptual framework for this study. The first two parts of this section will present and discuss the theoretical concepts (i.e., consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence and social comparison orientation) used to ground consumer desire for prominent brand

markings. The third and fourth parts will present the consumer behavior concepts (i.e., status consumption and desire for unique consumer products) used to justify consumer preference for prominent brand markings. Next, the consumer preference for prominent brand markings concept is presented and studies that precede this dissertation are reviewed. Lastly, the concept, ethnic identity, is reviewed and prior consumer research is discussed to substantiate its importance in consumer research.

### **Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence**

The concept, consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII), was introduced by Bearden et al. (1989) to measure the influence reference groups have on an individual's purchase behavior. The premise for developing the concept stems from Stafford and Cohanougher (1977) stating consumer behavior cannot be fully understood without examining the effects of interpersonal influence on development of attitudes, norms, values, aspirations and purchase behavior (Bearden et al., 1989). The CSII concept comes from the reference group determinant "susceptibility of individuals to group influence" mentioned earlier in the "Reference Group Theory" section. Unlike the susceptibility to interpersonal influence determinant, consumer research initially divided normative interpersonal influence into two additional dimensions; value-expressive and utilitarian (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Park & Lessig, 1977). This took CSII from two to three dimensions. However, Bearden et al. (1989) found there was no significant difference between the value-expressive and utilitarian dimensions of CSII, recombined them and stated CSII manifests in the following three ways:



1. the need to identify with or enhance one's image in the opinion of significant others (i.e., value-expressive aspect of normative influence)
2. the willingness to conform to the expectations of others (i.e., utilitarian aspect of normative influence), and
3. the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others or seeking information from others (i.e., informational influence) (Bearden et al., 1989, p. 473).

This study will refer to the value-expressive and utilitarian influencers of CSII as normative consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (i.e., normative CSII) for the remainder of this study.

Normative CSII influences consumption behavior because it drives a person to conform to the expectation of others with whom they are 1) physically close (e.g., family, next door neighbor), 2) have a personal connection with (e.g., person that shares same ethnicity or culture) or 3) have known for a length of time (e.g., best friend from childhood) (Shukla, 2011). Normative CSII manifests for two reasons: to avoid group disapproval and to be rewarded by the group (Bearden et al., 1989). Thus, normative CSII is triggered by a person's need to identify with, enhance one's image and/or conform to significant others' expectations (Bearden et al., 1989).

Informational CSII, on the other hand, does not require a person to be a member of a group in order to be influenced by it. Information about products and services are sought two ways; search for information from knowledgeable others or making inferences based on observing the behavior of others (Bearden & Etzel, 1989; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Park & Lessig, 1977). This type of CSII can be ignited by an individual's aspirational desires to join a group they are not a member of or desire to avoid being

associated with. Informational CSII can also be triggered by a need to seek information about a product or brand an individual is not knowledgeable about.

Table 3 shows the common themes found when CSII literature was reviewed. The table shows early CSII research focused on scale development as well as testing the CSII scale in different ethnic groups. Antecedents and consequences of both CSII dimensions (i.e., normative and informational) were also investigated. Review of the literature shows CSII drives several consumption-related behaviors such as increased frequency of shopping with friends (Huang, Wang, & Shi, 2012), group buying behavior (Kuan, Zhong, & Chau, 2014), and purchasing what friends recommend (Huang et al., 2012). These findings in previous studies make CSII an effective construct in determining an individual's consumption behavior (i.e., status consumption).

*Table 3*

*Summary of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence Studies*

<b>Research Themes</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Creation and validation of CSII scale	Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel (1989)	Developed a consumer-oriented measurement to examine susceptibility to interpersonal influence.
	Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel (1990)	CSII scale was “strongly related to behavioral indices reflecting both normative and informational influence” (p. 775).
	Schroeder (1996)	Further validated using CSII scale in consumer behavior research.
Exploring the use of CSII in different ethnic groups	D’Rozario (2001a)	CSII was identical in Chinese and Armenian immigrants and comparable to the Anglo-participants in Bearden et al.’s (1989) study.
	D’Rozario (2001b)	Euro- and Chinese-American reactions to CSII were identical. Hispanic- and African-Americans responded differently to CSII.

	D'Rozario & Yang (2012)	CSII's effect depends on the information source and product. Chinese-Americans used more external sources (e.g., advertisements, neutral sources of information and in-store displays) when conducting a product information search.
	Kropp, Lavack, & Silvera (2005)	CSII's effect depends on consumers' culture of origin. Consumers from eastern cultures (i.e., Koreans) were higher in normative CSII than consumers from western cultures (i.e., Canadians, Australians and Norwegians).
Antecedents of normative CSII	Huang, Wang, & Shi (2012)	Anxiety
	Isaken & Roper (2008)	Income
	Kropp et al., (2005)	Internal values; External values; Importance of the group to one's identity
	Kuan, Zhong, & Chau (2014)	Need to be liked
	Lord, Lee, & Choong (2001)	Conspicuousness
	Shoham (2003)	Age
Antecedents of informational CSII	Clark & Goldsmith (2006a, 2006b)	Attention to Social Comparison Information (ATSCI)
	Huang et al. (2012)	Anxiety
	Isaken & Roper (2008)	Income
	Kuan et al. (2014)	Need to be right
	Lord et al. (2001)	Involvement
Consequences of normative CSII	Huang et al. (2012)	Increased frequency of shopping with friends; Increased spending
	Kuan et al. (2014)	Group-buying behavior; Positive emotions
	Ladero, Casquet, & Singh (2015)	Values
	Lord et al. (2001)	Frequent contact with and take purchase-relevant advice from referents
	Prete, Guido, & Pichierri (2013)	Consumer hypnotic-like suggestibility
	Sadachar, Khare, & Manchajju (2016)	General environmentally responsible behavior

	Sen, Gurhan-Canli, & Morwitz (2001)	Consumer boycotts
	Shoham (2003)	Fashionable clothing is more important
Consequences of informational CSII	Bravo, Fraj, & Martinez (2006)	Family awareness; Family influence on patterns of consumption
	Huang et al. (2012)	See friends as more knowledgeable; Increased compliance with friends' recommendations
	Kuan et al. (2014)	Group-buying behavior; Negative emotions
	Mourali, Laroche, & Pons (2005)	Preference for personal information
	Prete et al. (2013)	Consumer hypnotic-like suggestibility
	Ladero et al. (2015)	Values

### **Social Comparison Orientation**

The concept, social comparison orientation (SCO), was created and introduced by Gibbons and B. Buunk (1999) to capture individual differences in the sensitivity to social comparison. B. Buunk, Zurriaga, Peiro, Nauta, and Gosalvez (2005) describe SCO as

the personality disposition of individuals who base their self-evaluation to an important extent on how others are doing, who tend to relate what happens to others to themselves, and who are interested in information about the features and accomplishments of others in similar circumstances (p. 65).

Gibbons and B. Buunk (1999) found a positive correlation between SCO, interpersonal orientation and communal orientation. These positive correlations lead to a consensus that SCO is more prevalent in individuals with a positive orientation towards others. The SCO process is also motivated by self-evaluation, self-improvement and self-enhancement (Nichols & Schumann, 2012). As stated in the social comparison theory

section, one or more of these motivations causes a person to assess how similar or dissimilar they are in comparison to someone they feel is the standard.

SCO has been used to test individual differences and clarify meanings of responses to social comparison in a myriad of areas such as: depression (B. Buunk & Brenninkmeijer, 2001), professional burn out (B. Buunk, Ybema, Gibbons, & Ipenburg, 2001), neuroticism (B. Buunk, Van der Zee, & VanYperen, 2001), jealousy-evoking nature of rival characteristics (Dijkstra & B. Buunk, 2002), health-promoting behaviors such as nutrition and physical activity (Luszczynska, Gibbons, Piko, & Tekozel, 2004), work setting (B. Buunk, Zurriaga, Peiro, Nauta, & Gosalvez, 2005), group satisfaction (B. Buunk, Nauta, & Molleman, 2005), people with serious illnesses and diseases (A. Buunk, Zurriaga, Gonzalez, Terol, & Roig, 2006), happily married others (A. Buunk, 2006), career adaptability of college graduates (Wang & Fu, 2015), comparison to attractive targets (Bosch, A. Buunk, Siero, & Park, 2010) and quality of life (A. Buunk et al., 2012). From these various SCO studies, numerous characteristics of an individual high in social comparison have been discovered. Gibbons and B. Buunk (1999) found individuals high in SCO also are highly interdependent, have a high uncertainty about themselves as well as a strong dependency on other people for their self-evaluation. They are also high in neuroticism, social anxiety and low self-esteem (A. Buunk et al., 2006; Gibbons & B. Buunk, 1999).

B. Buunk and Mussweiler (2001) state individuals high in SCO tend “to relate what happens to others to themselves, and to be interested in information about others’ thoughts and behaviors in similar circumstances” (p. 470). Dijkstra and B. Buunk (2002)

found people high in SCO exuded the following jealousy rival characteristics: social dominance, physical dominance, physical attractiveness, seductive behaviors and social status. McIntyre and Eisenstadt (2011) found individuals high in SCO had a higher frequency of dejection-related emotions. Michinov and Michinov (2011) found individuals high in SCO also have high accessibility and awareness of the self; an interest in what others feel and think; and a degree of negative emotion and chronic uncertainty about themselves. There is also a thread of research where findings show people who are high in SCO have a tendency to focus on the negative implications of social comparisons thereby making more downward social comparisons than upward (B. Buunk, et al., 2005; B. Buunk et al., 2001; A. Buunk, Zurriaga, & Peiro, 2010; Dijkstra & B. Buunk, 2002; Michinov, 2007). The negative feelings an individual has stems from the individual's perception that their comparison target is better off than them or out of reach (A. Buunk, Groothof, & Siero, 2007).

Due to SCO being introduced at the end of the 90s, the body of research using the concept in consumer research is sparse yet growing. In fact, from searching the literature, it was found the concept has been incorporated within the last five years. The findings thus far in consumer research have been varied. For example, A. Buunk and Dijkstra (2011) studied the role of SCO in women's attitude toward attractive same-sex models and product in advertisements. Results showed when women were not primed on being female, increasing levels of SCO were connected to a more positive attitude toward the product when the advertisement had a more attractive model than a less attractive model. When women were being primed on being female, increasing levels of SCO were

connected to a less positive attitude toward the product when the advertisement had a more attractive model than a less attractive model. Nichols and Schumann (2012) conducted a similar study to A. Buunk and Dijkstra (2011) examining what type of model (e.g., similar or aspirational other) consumers prefer to see representing functional and symbolic products. Findings showed individuals high in SCO preferred to see aspirational models promoting symbolic products over functional products.

In a study conducted by Kang and Park-Poaps (2011), SCO was found to have an effect on the following dimensions of social shopping for fashion: social browsing, social bonding, opinion showing and power seeking. Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (2011) tested “whether consumers who compare themselves more to a superior other would be willing to pay more for something that this other person had, and whether the effect was driven by (benign) envy” (p. 986). The authors found SCO had an effect on envy and consumers high in SCO also had a higher willingness to pay for a product.

Ierlan and Considine (2015) investigated the influence comparative reference groups have on consumer spending. They found individuals high in SCO will increase spending when dissociative groups are spending more than them. Individuals do not change their spending when they learn their aspirational groups are spending less than them. Also, individuals low in SCO will spend more on public products when making upward comparisons. They do not change their spending on public products when making downward comparisons.

A few studies have been conducted exploring the effect of SCO in digital media. Shen (2012) found SCO to be a predictor of perceived usefulness and perceived

enjoyment of social shopping websites. Steers, Wickham, and Acitelli (2014) found that men who spend more time on Facebook are also high in SCO. SCO was also positively related to increased depression. Vogel, Rose, Okdie, Eckles, and Franz (2015) explored the relationship between SCO, Facebook use and negative psychological outcomes. Like Steers et al. (2014), Vogel et al. (2015) found participants high in SCO also had higher utilization of Facebook. Participants high in SCO and Facebook use were also found to have poorer self-perceptions, lower self-esteem and more negative affect balance. From reviewing consumer literature that utilized SCO, it was concluded SCO is a critical factor that influences various aspects of consumption (i.e., status consumption and desire for unique consumer products). Therefore, SCO was integrated into this dissertation's framework.

### **Status Consumption**

The status consumption (SC) concept examines consumers tendency to buy products for the status they confer (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999). In order to understand SC, one must first understand status itself. Eastman, Goldsmith, and Flynn (1999) define status as “the position or rank in a society or group awarded to an individual by others” (p. 42). Status is a form of power that many people desire and put a lot of energy into acquiring (Eastman et al., 1999). Researchers have distinguished three types of status: 1) status by definition or assignment (e.g., royalty), 2) status by achievement (e.g., receive higher status for doing a better job than coworkers), and 3) status acquired through ownership of certain products and brands (Eastman et al., 1999).



Like Eastman et al.'s (1999) study, this dissertation is focusing on status through ownership of certain products and brands (i.e., status consumption).

SC was originally defined by Eastman et al. (1999) as “the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer or symbolize status for both the individual and surrounding others” (p. 41). Originally, researchers viewed conspicuous consumption as a component of status consumption. However, O’Cass and McEwen (2004) demonstrated SC and conspicuous consumption are two different constructs. Currently, SC is being defined as “the interest a consumer has to improve one’s social and/or self-standing through consumption of consumer products that may be conspicuous and that confer and symbolize status for the individual and surrounding significant others” (Eastman & Eastman, 2015, p. 3).

A key dimension of SC is social visibility (Chao & Schor, 1998). Another important component of SC is it includes increasing the status of the individual (i.e., personal/internal reasons) as well as increasing the status of significant others around the individual (i.e., social/external reasons) (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). When a person desiring status makes a purchase, he or she buys an object that represents status to both the individual and to those in their immediate and/or desired peer group (Eastman et al., 1999). For example, a Black celebrity purchases a Rolls Royce, which is a luxury vehicle. Often, Black people are proud of celebrities who share their ethnicity. The celebrity’s success and financial ability to purchase the luxury car is claimed by the entire

ethnic group as a symbol of success. Thus, the consumption of products that symbolize status aids in a person's quest for self-respect and social approval (Eastman et al., 1999).

When reviewing consumer literature, there were three common threads of research found; motives for SC, antecedents of SC and consequences of SC (see Table 4). Review of the literature provided two reasons for including SC in this dissertation study. First, one or both dimensions of CSII were found to be antecedents of SC in a few studies (Clark, Zboja, & Goldsmith, 2007; Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Second, some studies showed an effect of SC on some aspects of branding (Eastman, Iyer, & Thomas, 2013; Geiger-Oneto, Geib, Walker, & Hess, 2013; Goldsmith, Flynn, & Kim, 2010) leading to an assumption that SC may also be able to explain the level of prominence consumers prefer in brand markings.

*Table 4*

*Summary of Status Consumption Studies*

<b>Research Themes</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Motives for status consumption	Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn (1999)	Improve social standing.
	O'Cass & Frost (2002)	Gain social prestige.
	O'Cass & McEwen (2004)	Signal wealth through public display. Self-reward without public display of the products.
Antecedents of status consumption	Mai & Tambyah (2011)	Modern status orientation; Traditional status orientation; Success; Individualistic self; Consumer ethnocentrism
	O'Cass & McEwen (2004)	Normative CSII

	Heaney, Goldsmith, & Jusoh (2005)	Materialism
	Clark, Zboja, & Goldsmith (2007)	Conformity; Need for uniqueness; Informational CSII; Normative CSII; Attention to Social Comparison Information (ATSCI)
	Riquelme, Rios, & Al-Sharhan (2011)	CSII; Age; Income; Materialism; Materialistically
	Cinjarevic & Alic (2012)	Value-expressive reference group influence
	Eastman & Iyer (2012)	Cognitive age (feeling younger than numerical age)
	Kastanakis & Balabanis (2012)	Independent self-concept; Interdependent self-concept
	Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara (2012)	CSII
	Mann & Sahni (2015)	Ostentation + signaling; Social conformity
Consequences of status consumption	Heaney et al. (2005)	Attention To Social Comparison Information (ATSCI)
	Goldsmith, Clark, & Goldsmith (2006)	Market mavenism
	Clark et al. (2007)	Opinion leadership; Opinion seeking
	Goldsmith, Flynn, & Kim (2010)	Clothing involvement; Clothing innovativeness; Clothing brand loyalty; Clothing price sensitivity
	Eastman & Eastman (2011)	Consumers high in SC are not price conscious
	Mai & Tambyah (2011)	Status product ownership
	Ranjbarian, Barari, & Salehnia (2011)	Word of mouth
	Kastanakis & Balabanis (2012)	Bandwagon effect
	Eastman, Iyer, & Thomas (2013)	Brand conscious style; Novelty/fashion conscious style; Recreational/shopping conscious style; Impulsive/careless shopping style; Habitual/brand loyal shopping style
	Geiger-Oneto, Geib, Walker, & Hess (2013)	Choose authentic luxury brand or luxury counterfeit brand; Status insecurity→Choose authentic luxury brand or counterfeit luxury brand; High value

	consciousness + SC→Choose non-luxury brand or counterfeit luxury brand
Eastman & Eastman (2015)	P1: Private consumption; P2: Subtle consumption; P3: Public consumption; P4: Conspicuous consumption
Mann & Sahni (2015)	Self-expression

## Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity (EI) is a complex, multidimensional construct (Phinney & Ong, 2007) that has to be broken down into several mini-topics in order to understand it. Reason being, the words race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably in academic research making it difficult to effectively define the EI concept. In order to understand the EI concept, it will be discussed in the following parts: difference between race and ethnicity, what is EI and findings in EI-oriented consumer research.

**Race vs. ethnicity.** The words “race” and “ethnicity” are often used interchangeably and therefore, many academicians think they are the same but they are not. Race is a social construct that arose out of Africans being enslaved in the United States (Smedley, 1997). It was used as a way to create physical and status differences between Africans, Indians and Europeans. A person’s physical features were used as markers or symbols of their status thus justifying their positions in the American social system (Smedley, 1997). Post slavery, race continued and still continues to be used to classify “who should have access to privilege, power, status and wealth, and who should not” (Smedley, 1997). Specifically, racially-oriented research has focused on

institutionalized racism and predominately used Black sample populations (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

While race is *not* a biological category as academia has suggested, ethnicity is used to describe a person's cultural background. Ethnicity is based on a group of people who share common characteristics such as ancestry, language, culture, religion, beliefs and customs. Ethnically-oriented research largely refers to one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and has been conducted with adolescents and college students from a variety of ethnic groups (Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

**Ethnic identity.** EI lacks theoretical development making it difficult for its founders, social psychology researchers, to agree on a common definition (Garcia, 1982; Kolm, 1974; Phinney, 1990). However, there is agreement on some common characteristics of the concept. The first point EI researchers agree on is the concept is rooted in two theories; social identity theory (Cislo, 2008; Lee, Fairhurst, & Dillard, 2002; Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000; Xu, Shim, Lotz, & Almeida, 2004) and acculturation theory (Forney, 1981; Lee et al., 2002; Chen, Aung, Zhou, & Kanetkar, 2005; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000; Williams & Qualls, 1989; Xu et al., 2004; Yancey, Ericksen, & Juliani, 1976). Social identity theory is based on people adopting the identity of the social groups they belong to. Acculturation theory is based on a person borrowing traits from another culture; typically when a move from one country to another has occurred. EI somewhat merges the two theories in that it is believed that over time, a person's social identity evolves and a person may or may not stay committed to their ethnic origin.

EI has four stages of development and it begins at childhood and extends into adulthood. The first stage, ethnic identity diffusion, is described as “little to no exploration of one’s ethnicity and no clear understanding of the issues” (Phinney, 1989, p. 38). The second stage, foreclosed, is “little or no exploration of ethnicity, but apparent clarity about one’s own ethnicity. Feelings about one’s ethnicity may be either positive or negative, depending on one’s socialization experiences” (Phinney, 1989, p. 38). The third stage, moratorium, is “evidence of exploration, accompanied by some confusion about the meaning of one’s own ethnicity” (Phinney, 1989, p. 38). The fourth stage, ethnic identity achievement, involves “a firm commitment to one’s ethnicity based on an exploration that has led to a clear understanding of ethnicity” (Phinney & Ong, 2007, p. 275).

In addition to the stages of EI development, ethnic self-identification is an important component in describing EI (Villarreal & Peterson, 2009). Reason being, individuals may label themselves differently. For example, in the U.S., the most common labels for U.S. Hispanics is Hispano/a, Latino/a and Chicano/a. However, individuals may also include their country of origination in their ethnic identification (e.g., Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican, etc.). Asian (e.g., Chinese, Korean, Indian, Taiwanese, etc.) and Black (e.g., African, Nigerian, Jamaican, Trinidadian, etc.) consumers may identify with their country of origin as well. Individuals may or may not use the word “American” in the self-identification part of EI.

The problem with allowing consumers to identify their own ethnicity (i.e., self-identification, self-labeling or self-definition) is they may perceive their ethnicity

differently from their actual descent (i.e., ethnic background of parents). We can assume a consumer knows their ethnicity as an adolescent but the issue is whether they actually choose that same label as an adult and how this impacts their purchase behavior. Self-identification based on a limited amount of choices on a survey puts consumers in more of a forced labeling situation. They may feel the labeling is inaccurate and identify as partly ethnic and partly mainstream. In summary, self-identification is important to include in consumer research but is only one aspect of the EI process. For this reason, Phinney (1990) argues a person's sense of belonging to their ethnic group, along with how important ethnicity is to their identity as a whole also needs to be assessed along with self-identification.

**Ethnic identity in consumer research.** Phinney and Ong's (2007) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement-Revised (MEIM-R) is being used in this study to examine EI in a consumer context. This is mentioned here because there are other measurements (e.g., Ethnic/Cultural Dimensions Scale, Bicultural Identity Integration Scale, Ethnic Identity Scale) that also measure EI (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). MEIM-R was chosen because it measures the three biggest aspects of EI; self-identification, exploration and commitment to one's ethnicity. It was also chosen because it was created to examine the strength of EI in the same populations this study is examining; Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, Whites and Biracial participants.

While reviewing consumer research using MEIM-R to measure the strength of EI in individuals, more studies were found using the original version of the scale, MEIM, which was created by Phinney (1992) (see Table 5). Studies examining EI in Asians

showed EI to be a predictor of the following: parental cultural identification, ethnic-friendship orientation and culture-specific consumption behavior (Xu et al., 2004). Studies showed black consumers had varied degrees of EI (i.e., not a homogenous consumer group) (Meyers, 2011; Williams & Grantham, 1999) and responded more favorably to Black models and negatively to White models in advertisements (Elias, Appiah, & Gong, 2011). Villarreal and Peterson (2009) showed Hispanic consumers with high EI are likely to be brand loyal. Williams and Grantham (1999) showed Whites had varying degrees of EI which leads to the conclusion the group's consumption behaviors are not homogenous. Chattaraman and Lennon (2008) found cultural apparel consumption, internal emotions (e.g., self-esteem) and internal meaning (e.g., feeling connected to the ethnic background) to be predictors of EI in Asian, Black, Hispanic, American Indian and Biracial consumer groups.

Overall, the literature using MEIM to measure EI in consumer studies shows future research is needed to examine how EI affects the relationship between an individual's reference group behavior and consumption behavior (i.e., status consumption) (see Table 5). Also, the use of EI in consumer research needs to continue in order to gain more insight into its effect on consumption behavior and develop common research threads. It is believed EI is an important concept to include in consumer research because it can predict a consumer's behavior, attitudes and consumption practices (Elias et al., 2011). Marketers often times assume members of an ethnic group are all homogenous (Elias et al., 2011; Williams & Grantham, 1999). However, some research shows not all persons belonging to an ethnic group attach the



same magnitude or valence to their racial or ethnic membership (Elias et al., 2011).

Some people may consider their ethnicity an important part of their social identity while others may believe their ethnic group membership is less important (Elias et al., 2011).

Therefore, if ethnic groups are not expected to always be homogenous, then it should also be expected or assumed there will be some variation in consumption of individuals in ethnic groups (Mich & Keillor, 2011). This is why this study is incorporating EI; to examine its effect in a consumer text.

*Table 5*

*Consumer Research Using the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement (MEIM)*

<b>Ethnicity of Participants</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Blacks and Whites	Williams & Grantham (1999)	Black and White consumers were not a homogenous group when prompted by ads using Ebonics.
Asian Americans, Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, Vietnamese Americans, Filipino Americans and others (Indian Americans/Mixed)	Xu, Shim, Lotz, & Almeida (2004)	EI was a predictor of parental cultural identification, ethnic-friendship orientation, and culture-specific consumption behavior (e.g., food & entertainment behavior).
Asian/Asian-American, Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, Biracial	Chattaraman & Lennon (2008)	EI predicts cultural apparel consumption, attribution of internal emotions, and attribution of internal meaning.
Hispanics	Villarreal & Peterson (2009)	EI can be used to operationalize “Hispanicness”. Hispanics high in EI are likely to be brand loyal.

Blacks	Elias, Appiah, & Gong (2011)	Race moderated the relationship between EI and consumer attitude.
Black students	Meyers (2011)	There are varying degrees of EI within the Black consumer group.

### **Desire for Unique Consumer Products**

The construct, desire for unique consumer products (DUCP), was created by Lynn and Harris (1997) to examine why consumers differ in their personal goals for possessing consumer goods, services and experiences that few others possess. It is distinct to consumer research and derived from the social psychology concept, need for uniqueness (NFU), created by Snyder and Fromkin (1977). NFU is considered an individual trait; therefore, it varies in each person and induces a person to not conform to certain group norms (i.e., counter-conformity).

Consuming unique products is one of several ways individuals use to separate themselves from others. Consumers who desire unique products can be described as being desirous of goods, services and experiences that are new, scarce and customizable (Lynn & Harris, 1997). They also are more inclined to shop at small, unique retail outlets (e.g., boutiques) (Lynn & Harris, 1997).

When the body of consumer research evaluating DUCP was reviewed, four research threads were discovered (see Table 6). The first thread of research explores the characteristics (i.e., fashion leaders; innovative) of high DUCP consumers from a particular group (i.e., gay vs. heterosexual males; regular wearers of vintage clothing vs. regular wearers of new clothing) (Reiley & DeLong, 2011; Vandecasteele & Geuens,

2009). The second thread of research discovered the following antecedents of DUCP: need for uniqueness (NFU) (Song & Lee, 2013), interdependence (Song & Lee, 2013), face saving (Jin & Son, 2014), and materialism (Jin & Son, 2014). The third thread of research found the following consequences of DUCP: innovativeness (Goldsmith, Clark, & Goldsmith, 2006; Peng, Cui, & Li, 2012), nonconformity (Goldsmith et al., 2006), attitude towards e-customized apparel (Kang & Kim, 2012), perceived behavioral control (Kang & Kim, 2012) and perceived uniqueness (Song & Lee, 2013). The fourth thread of research found DUCP to be a moderator of the effects of virtual experience (Keng, Tran, Liao, Yao, & Hsu, 2014) and the effect of materialism on sharing intentions (Akbar, Mai, & Hoffman, 2016).

After reviewing the DUCP literature, it was concluded DUCP would be beneficial to this dissertation's proposed framework for a few reasons. One, previous consumer studies (Karlsson, Dellgran, Klingander, & Garling, 2004; Karlsson, Garling, Dellgran, & Klingander, 2005; Moschis, 1976) have shown social comparison influences purchase and consumption behavior (i.e., consumption of luxury goods and purchase decision of durable goods) as well as consumer's need for uniqueness (CNFU) (Irmak, Vallen, & Sen, 2010) from which the DUCP concept is derived. Two, studies (Goldsmith et al., 2006; Peng et al., 2012) have shown a person's level of DUCP influences how they use consumption to differentiate themselves from others thereby making it a good concept to explore the different levels of consumer preference for prominent brand markings.

Table 6

*Summary of Desire for Unique Consumer Products' Studies*

<b>Research Themes</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Types and characteristics of DUCP consumers	Vandecasteele & Geuens (2009)	Gay males had a higher DUCP than heterosexual males. DUCP is a possible antecedent of innovativeness.
	Reiley & DeLong (2011)	Regular wearers of vintage clothing had higher DUCP scores than new clothing wearers. High DUCP consumers saw themselves as fashion leaders.
Antecedents of DUCP	Song & Lee (2013)	Need for uniqueness; Interdependence
	Jin & Son (2014)	Face saving; Materialism
Consequences of DUCP	Goldsmith, Clark, & Goldsmith (2006)	Innovativeness; Nonconformity behavior
	Kang & Kim (2012)	Attitude towards e-customized apparel; Perceived behavioral control
	Peng, Cui, & Li (2012)	Innovativeness
	Song & Lee (2013)	Perceived uniqueness
DUCP as a moderator	Keng, Tran, Liao, Yao, & Hsu (2014)	DUCP moderated the effects of the virtual consumer experience.
	Akbar, Mai, & Hoffman (2016)	DUCP moderated the effect of materialism on sharing intentions.

### Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings

The term, consumer preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM), was created by the author of this dissertation based on Han et al.'s (2010) introduction of a fairly new marketing concept called brand prominence. Brand prominence is closely associated with status signaling and Veblen's (1973) theory of conspicuous consumption (Han et al., 2010; Schulz & Schulz, 2012; Thwaites & Ferguson, 2012). Han et al. (2010) defined it as "the extent to which a good has visible markings that help ensure observers recognize the brand" (p. 15). Han et al. (2010) classified luxury goods with a logo (e.g.,

car emblems from Volvo and Mercedes; Gucci sunglasses; handbags from Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Coach, Ralph Lauren, Kipling and Longchamp; Louis Vuitton shoes for men) as high in brand prominence. Likewise, they classified luxury goods with unique and subtle design features and symbols (e.g., shape of handle, plaid patterns, stitching, exotic leather, etc.) as low in brand prominence. While Han et al.'s (2010) study specifically focused on brand prominence of luxury goods, they also recognized it has become common for all brands (i.e., luxury and non-luxury) to mark their goods differently to be more or less visible. As stated in Chapter I of this study, brand prominence will be referred to as "prominent brand markings" throughout this study.

Thus far, only a couple of studies have been published examining preference for prominent brand markings. Han et al. (2010) published the first academic study and taught us a person's wealth, need for status and preference for prominent brand markings correspond with their desire to associate or disassociate with their own and other reference groups. A study conducted by Schulz and Schulz (2012) attempted to extend the literature on prominent brand markings by adding three new brand-related variables to the concept; brand presence, brand frequency and brand abbreviation. Using images of a brand's logo (i.e., luxury brand Armani vs. mass market brand Abercrombie & Fitch) on t-shirts in single, repetitive and abbreviated form, the authors discovered participants preferred brand frequency (i.e., logo is on t-shirt multiple times) and a full brand symbol over an abbreviated brand symbol. Another study conducted by Thwaites and Ferguson (2012) took Han et al.'s (2010) original study and examined the preference for prominent brand markings in two consumer groups; fashion change agents and fashion followers.

Thwaites and Ferguson (2012) concluded the need for status was an antecedent of preference for prominent brand markings. However, there was no difference found in preference for prominent brand markings between fashion change agents and fashion followers. In summary, review of the literature showed existing research on prominent brand markings is limited and lacks theoretical support. The author of this dissertation created a theoretical framework to examine the factors that affect CPPBM.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **The Conceptual Model**

Given the significant gaps and lack of research on prominent brand markings, this empirical study begins to understand the social psychological, consumer behavior and ethnic group conditions that influence consumers' preference for prominent brand markings. Based on an extensive review of the literature, a comprehensive framework was developed (see Figure 6). There are two basic premises of the conceptual model. The first premise is a consumer's level of susceptibility to group influence (i.e., normative and informational CSII) and level of social comparison orientation effect their decision to purchase products to exhibit their status (i.e., status consumption) and/or uniqueness (i.e., desire for unique consumer products), which in turn influences their consumer preference for prominent brand markings. The second premise is a consumer's level of identification with their ethnicity (i.e., ethnic identification) moderates the relationship between their susceptibility to interpersonal influence (i.e., normative and informational CSII) and consumption of status goods (i.e., status consumption).

Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII), one of the seven determinants of reference group theory, was incorporated into the framework based on reference group theory and social comparison orientation (SCO) was included based on social comparison theory. In this proposed research framework, the two dimensions of CSII (i.e., normative and informational CSII) are considered antecedents of status consumption (SC). SCO was incorporated into the model as an antecedent of two consumer behavior concepts in this model; SC and desire for unique consumer products (DUCP). SCO will examine how a person's perception of themselves in comparison to others influences their purchase of goods that help them signal their status (i.e., SC) or uniqueness (i.e., DUCP). SC and DUCP were included in the framework as direct antecedents of consumer preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM). Based on this conceptual model (see Figure 6), eight hypotheses are presented. In this section, each hypothesis with an associated justification is presented.

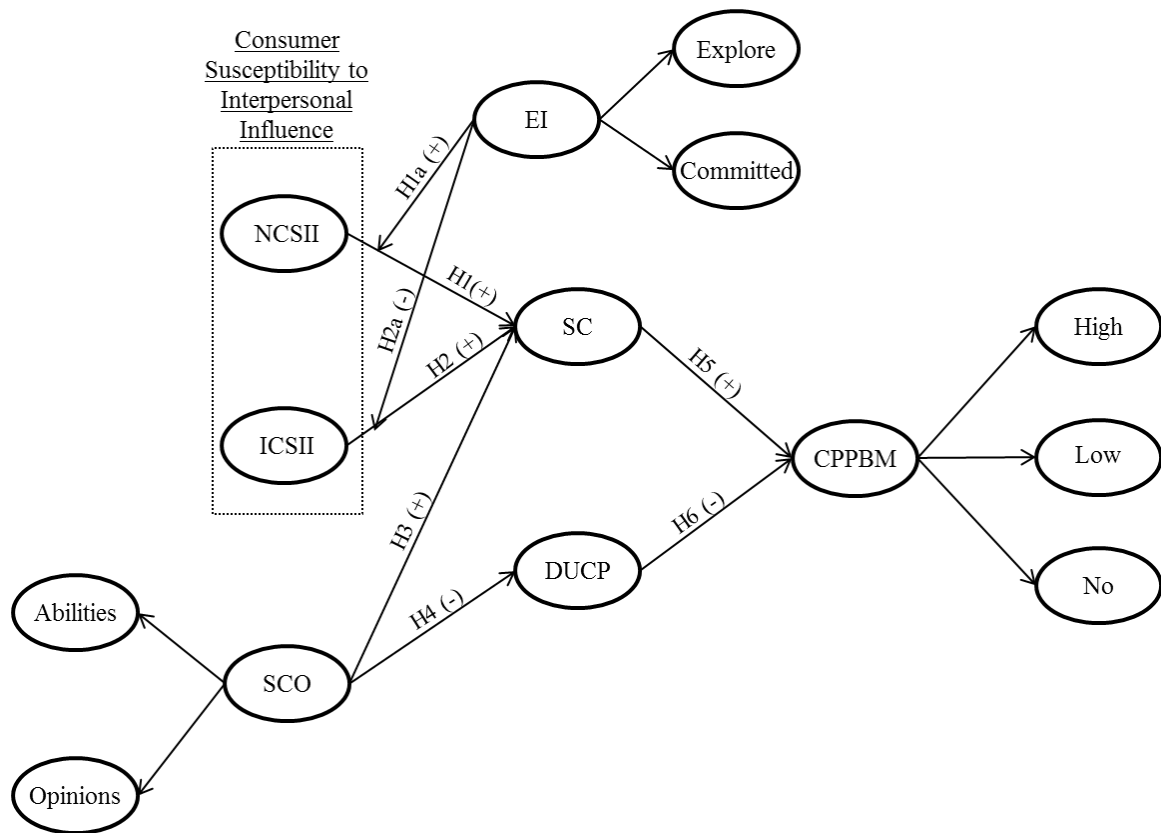


Figure 6. Conceptual Framework.

## Hypotheses Development

### The Relationship between Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence and Status Consumption

It is posited one of the antecedents to status consumption (SC) is consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII). The logic behind this prediction stems from the meaning behind status. “Status is the position or rank in a society or group awarded to an individual by others....It is a form of power that consists of respect, consideration, and envy from others and represents the goals of a culture” (Eastman et al., 1999, p. 42). As discussed in the literature review section, there are three types of status



(Eastman et al., 1999). This study focuses on status by consumption where a consumer seeks status by consuming products and/or brands that bring social visibility to one's status (O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

Acquisition of material goods is one of the strongest measures of one's status and success in society (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). These goods communicate messages to others about a person while also determining how others perceive the person (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). To show one's status, he/she purchases goods that have strong brand recognition and possess symbolic properties on the cultural group and individual levels (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). Since SC involves a public demonstration (i.e., presence of "others") of a person's social standing (i.e., status), it is predicted the relationship between the dimensions of CSII (i.e., normative and informational) and SC exist because "brands having the ability to communicate messages about a person to others" (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004, p. 28). It is expected consumers high in normative CSII are likely to purchase the same product and/or brand as "close others" to be rewarded or avoid disapproval.

Several studies tested and found a positive relationship between normative CSII and SC. Therefore, it is expected the same relationship will be found in this study as well. O'Cass and McEwen (2004) used a student sample to test if normative CSII was an antecedent of SC. Using a student sample, fashion clothing and sunglasses as symbols of status, the study affirmed the relationship between the two variables. Like O'Cass and McEwen (2004), Clark, Zboja, and Goldmith (2007) corroborate normative CSII's impact on SC using a student sample. In addition, Clark et al. (2007) stated conforming

to group norms is one part of the psychological profile of a status-seeking consumer.

Because normative CSII and SC share conformity as a characteristic, it is presumed the two concepts will be related to each other.

Riquelme, Rios, and Al-Sharhan (2011) also examined the relationship between normative CSII and SC in the context of Muslim consumers living in Kuwait. A list of luxury brands such as Burberry and Chanel were given to study participants because of their ability to show status and wealth. Like O'Cass and McEwen (2004) and Clark et al. (2007), the authors found a positive relationship between normative CSII and SC. Since consumers high in normative CSII are more socially aware, interested in social relationships and purchase products that signify status to themselves as well as members of their group (Clark et al., 2007; O'Cass & Frost, 2002; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004), it is posited consumers high in normative CSII will tend to choose a product and/or brand that allow them to show their status whether it be existing or implied. Based on this, it is hypothesized:

H1: There is a positive relationship between normative CSII and SC.

The other dimension of CSII, informational consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (informational CSII), is a person's tendency to purchase a product and/or brand they have seen another person with and/or after receiving information from someone they feel is a product expert (Bearden et al., 1989). Consumers high in informational CSII are influenced by people they do not spend a lot of time with (i.e., not close to), but observe their behavior, aspire to be like them and/or see as an expert (Childers & Rao, 1992). Occasions where informational CSII ignites SC could be when

an individual sees someone in public with a product they admire and possibly ask them where they purchased it from and what brand it is. An individual could also be inspired to purchase a product or brand based on observing a person of higher social status they aspire to be like. Lastly, an individual could also be influenced to purchase by seeking information from a brand ambassador or sales representative who is highly skilled and knowledgeable about the product and/or brand.

Consumer studies examining the effect of informational CSII on SC are limited and have conflicting outcomes. For example, while Clark et al. (2007) found a positive relationship between normative CSII and SC, they found a negative relationship between informational CSII and SC. On the other hand, Riquelme et al. (2011) found both normative CSII and informational CSII to have a positive effect on SC. While findings in previous studies conflict, it is posited there is a positive relationship between informational CSII and SC because non-significant others also have an effect on a person's status consumption behavior (Riquelme, Rios, & Al-Sharhan, 2011). Based on this, it is hypothesized:

H2: There is a positive relationship between informational CSII and SC.

### **The Moderating Role of Ethnic Identity on the Relationship between Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence and Status Consumption**

One of a person's primary interpersonal relationships and information sources is the ethnic group(s) they were born into. It is posited the relationship between the dimensions of CSII (i.e., normative CSII and informational CSII) and SC will be moderated by ethnic identity (EI). EI assesses how much a person explores their ethnic

origin and feels committed to their ethnic group. Although a person's ethnic group is assumed to also be one of their interpersonal influencers, a person's EI may change as a person ages and establishes interpersonal relationships with others outside their ethnic origin.

Studies examining EI as a moderator between the relationship of CSII and SC are limited. However, some studies found a positive relationship between EI and CSII and a positive relationship between EI and SC (Webster & Faircloth III, 1994). Jamal and Shukor (2014), Srinivasan, Srivastava, and Bhanot (2014) and van Kempen (2007) all bring to the forefront that consumers facing "racial or ethnic discrimination tend to spend heavily on socially visible consumption goods to make up for their low-status position in society" (Srinivasan, Srivastava, & Bhanot, 2014, p. 175). In other words, a person's inferior feelings about their social status which may be driven by ethnic discrimination, causes them to pay more for status goods in hopes of restoring a lost sense of power. Therefore, it may be derived that EI can influence SC behavior especially if a person is feeling inferior to the dominant ethnic group or being discriminated against by the dominant ethnic group in the country they currently reside. The above studies clearly support EI has an effect on CSII and SC individually.

It is further posited how a person self-identifies (i.e., level of EI) with their ethnic group may be a moderator between the dimensions of CSII on a person's SC behavior. This assumption is based on Kwak and Sojka's (2010) findings that the preference for purchasing luxury brands "to reinforce and communicate status is related to the degree of ethnic identification but not related to ethnic origin" (p. 374). If an individual has

positive feelings toward their ethnic group (i.e., pride, rich heritage), then the individual will want to associate with their ethnic group (Driedger, 1976). This desire to associate with one's ethnic group lends credence to the group having normative CSII on SC behavior. In simpler terms, if a person has a strong commitment to their ethnic group, then the ethnic group's norms and values will have a stronger impact on a person consuming status goods. Based on this,

H1a: Ethnic identity (EI) will moderate the relationship between normative CSII and status consumption (SC) such that the relationship between normative CSII and SC will be *stronger* in consumers with *high EI*.

Likewise, if a person has a weak association with their ethnic group, it is likely informational CSII will have a stronger impact on the person's SC behavior. A person may be influenced more by informational CSII when he or she feels their ethnic group is 1) inferior to a larger, dominant group or 2) restricted by a larger, dominant group (Driedger, 1976). Informational CSII can also be triggered when a person is 1) annoyed by their ethnic group or 2) feel it necessary to hide their ethnic heritage (Driedger, 1976). In an informational CSII situation, an individual's SC behavior is influenced by those outside of their ethnic group they observe using the product and/or seek product information from. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H2a: Ethnic identity (EI) will moderate the relationship between informational CSII and status consumption (SC) such that the relationship between informational CSII and SC will be *stronger* in consumers with *low EI*.

## **The Relationships between Social Comparison Orientation, Status Consumption and Desire for Unique Consumer Products**

Individuals who are sensitive to comparison information and also use social cues to define their consumption behavior tend to care strongly what other people think about them (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006). What undergirds this behavior is the process of social comparison orientation (SCO). As stated in the literature review, SCO is influenced by a person's reaction to comparison information. In a consumer context, SCO and status consumption (SC) share the following characteristics: have high social visibility, occur in a social environment and involve an evaluation of the self (B. Buunk & Mussweiler, 2001). Like status-oriented consumers, socially-oriented consumers pay attention to social and status cues which influence them to purchase the same products and/or brands as those in their social groups. For example, Kang and Park-Poaps (2011) mentioned status-seeking consumers as being very social shoppers who interact with others to gain power, attention and respect. Also, Dijkstra and B. Buunk (2002) found a link between SCO and social status in their study. This leads to the assumption SCO has a positive effect on SC. It is posited consumers *high in SCO* may also have a *high desire for status* thereby prompting them to consume goods high in status. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H3: There is a positive relationship between SCO and SC.

While there are times people do purchase items to express their similarity with comparative others, there are also times at which the level of similarity is so high it becomes unpleasant causing them to pursue some degree of differentness (Bertrandias &

Goldsmith, 2006; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). This behavior is called need for uniqueness (NFU). In a consumer context, people show their differentness or uniqueness with their possessions and consumer choices. This is called desire for unique consumer products (DUCP). DUCP is “a goal-oriented state whose strength, or intensity, varies across individuals” (Lynn & Harris, 1997, p. 603). The premise of this consumer concept is the higher the DUCP, the greater a person’s goal to buy and own products, services, brands and experiences few others possess (Reiley & DeLong, 2011). The characteristics needed for products, services, brands and experiences to be attractive to high DUCP customers are: scarcity, innovativeness, customization and/or out-of-date (i.e., vintage) (Reiley & DeLong, 2011).

It is posited consumers *low in SCO* will have a *high DUCP* due to their need to avoid being labeled as similar to others. High DUCP consumers are highly independent people so they tend to disregard group norms and social cues leading them to demonstrate nonconformity behavior (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006). It is believed this behavior will lead to consumers purchasing unique products. It is also believed consumers high in SCO will be less likely to desire and purchase unique products because of their tendency to feel uncertain about themselves in addition to evaluating themselves against others (Gibbons & B. Buunk, 1999). Based on these characteristics of DUCP consumers, it is hypothesized:

H4: There is a negative relationship between SCO and DUCP.

## **The Relationship between Status Consumption and Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings**

An individual's need for their status to be publicly recognized impacts their status consumption (SC) behavior (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). One way they ensure public recognition of their status is by purchasing products with prominent brand markings (Han et al., 2010; Thwaites & Ferguson, 2012). Prominent brand markings account for the amount of visibility a person desires when deciding what product to purchase.

As previously discussed in the literature review, Han et al. (2010) and Thwaites and Ferguson (2012) found a person's need for status predicated their preference for prominent brand markings on a good confirming a positive relationship between a person's need-for-status and their preference for prominent brand markings. Based on Han et al.'s (2010) and Thwaites and Ferguson's (2012) findings establishing status as a factor of preference for prominent brand markings, it is posited SC will positively affect consumer preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM). The assumption consumers high in SC will prefer products with prominent brand markings is predicated on previous findings that consumers high in SC desire goods that allow them to symbolically portray their implied or ascribed status of themselves as well as significant others around them (Eastman et al., 1999; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008; O'Cass & Frost, 2002). The need to portray status is what triggers consumers to buy products with prominent brand markings on the outside of the item. They also will buy, carry and wear popular brands that others can easily recognize to display their status. Based on this, it is hypothesized:



H5: There is a positive relationship between SC and CPPBM.

### **The Relationship between Desire for Unique Consumer Products and Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings**

A person's need for uniqueness (NFU) stems from them wanting to protect and exhibit their differentness from others. People who are more concerned with self-promotion tend to pursue uniqueness if the option provides an opportunity for self-enhancement. Consumers high in NFU are less concerned about protecting social/group norms because they feel social/group isolation is less risky than consumers low in NFU.

One of the ways a person displays their uniqueness is by consuming products. Han et al. (2010) and Thwaites and Ferguson (2012) discuss how some consumers do not require prominent brand markings on the products they purchase. These consumers are able to distinguish and ascribe status to products without a brand marking being publicly displayed on the outside. These consumers are also considered to be low in their preference for prominent brand markings. They prefer subtle/quiet/unique brand markings like the shape of a handle base; use of exotic fabrics and leathers; leather reinforced corners; removable parts; intricate beading, stitching or chain work; and specific color pattern(s) (Han et al., 2010).

It is posited consumers with a high desire for unique consumer products (DUCP) will not prefer products with prominent brand markings. Instead, they will prefer items with quiet/subtle/unique brand cues (i.e., low CPPBM). They will do this out of a need to protect their individuality (i.e., NFU). As stated earlier, highly independent consumers (i.e., consumers with high DUCP) will resist conforming to group norms and social cues

thereby making them less likely to purchase items with prominent brand markings.

Based on this, it is hypothesized:

H6: There is a negative relationship between DUCP and CPPBM.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology used in this study. Specifically, this chapter includes an explanation of the following: 1) Sample Population, 2) Data Collection, 3) Survey Instrument Development, 4) Pre-test of Full Survey and 5) Method of Analysis. The Sample Population section discusses target populations, the reason for choosing them and an actual description of participants from the distribution of the main survey. The self-identification portion of the ethnic identification measurement (MEIM-R) is also in this section. The Data Collection section describes the sampling techniques used and how data was collected. The Survey Instrument Development section details the seven measurements used based on the conceptual framework. Details of how the CPPBM measurement was created and finalized before incorporating it into the main survey instrument are also in this section. Lastly, the Method of Analysis section explains the statistical procedures used to test the CPPBM measurement, conceptual model and hypotheses.

#### **Sample Population**

People at least age 18 or older living in the United States (U.S.) from the four largest ethnic groups; Asians, Blacks, Caucasians and Hispanics were targeted to participate in this study. It should be noted the U.S. Census breaks the Hispanic population into White and Non-White categories. Participants in this study were not

divided based on racial criteria since the focal point is ethnic identification. Participants needed to have a high command of English as the survey was distributed in this language.

Caucasians were chosen because they are the numeric majority (62%-65%) in the U.S. (United States Census Bureau, 2015a). Also, the majority of goods and services in the U.S. are marketed towards this group. Caucasian U.S. citizens are also currently considered the “mainstream society” (Nielsen, 2015a). However, Asian, Black and Hispanic populations are also increasing; currently accounting for 35% to 38% of the total U.S. population and projected to be the numeric majority by 2044 (Nielsen, 2015a; United States Census Bureau, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b). The buying power of these groups has grown from \$661 billion in 1990 to \$3.4 trillion in 2014, a 415% increase making these populations important for marketers of goods and services in the U.S. to understand their consumer needs and demands along with the Caucasian population (Nielsen, 2015a).

Malhotra (2010) recommends sample size be a minimum of 400 when there are more than five constructs with several constructs having less than three indicators. There were seven constructs in this study so this recommendation was used to set the sample size. The goal was to sample a minimum of 400 participants (100 participants from each targeted ethnic group).

A total of 1,052 people participated in the main study; 2.6 times more than the goal of 400 participants. However, the sample was not representative of the four target populations (i.e., Asians, Blacks, Caucasians, Hispanics/Latinos). Fifty-nine percent (n=619) of the participants were of African descent (i.e., African, African American,

Black and Caribbean). Since it would be difficult to make adequate statistical comparisons between ethnic groups, it was decided to conduct analyses and report results based solely on consumers of African descent.

After the data was examined for duplicate IP addresses, missing values and participant engagement, 594 data points were left to analyze (see “Preparation of Data Collected in Main Survey” in Chapter IV for a detailed explanation). Of the 594 participants of African descent, 159 (26.8%) were men and 434 (73.1%) were women. There was one person (0.2%) who identified as transgender. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to the 70s. The majority of the participants were in their 40s (n=276, 46.5%). The second largest group of participants were in their 30s (n=122, 20.5%). Eighty-eight percent (n=524) of participants reported they were not a student. The majority of participants were highly educated with almost 89% (n=527) having either a bachelor’s (n=176, 29.6%), master’s (n=225, 37.9%) or doctoral (n=126, 21.2%) degree. Almost thirty-nine percent (n=229) of the participants had careers in the business industry and almost 25% (n=148) of participants had a career in education. Most participants reported their geographical location as South (n=384, 64.6%). Participants reported income ranging from \$0 to over \$440,000/year with the \$100,000-200,000/year (n=196, 33%) being the largest group, which is significantly above the U.S. median income of \$53,889/year (United States Census Bureau, 2015c). Table 7 presents a comprehensive overview of the demographic data.

Table 7

*Description of Study Participants*

Characteristics	Frequency (n=594)	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	159	26.8%
Women	434	73.1%
Transgender	1	0.02%
<b>Age</b>		
18-19	5	0.8%
20s	53	8.9%
30s	122	20.5%
40s	276	46.5%
50s	88	14.8%
60s	44	7.4%
70s	5	0.8%
No Answer	1	0.2%
<b>Student Status</b>		
High School & 18	1	0.2%
College Student & 18	1	0.2%
College Student >18	68	11.4%
Not a Student	524	88.2%
<b>Highest Education Level Obtained</b>		
High School	7	1.2%
Some College	46	7.7%
Community College	10	1.7%
Bachelor's Degree	176	29.6%
Master's Degree	225	37.9%
Doctorate	126	21.2%
Trade School	4	.7%
<b>Profession</b>		
Business	229	38.6%
Education	148	24.9%
Other*	159	26.8%
Not Working**	57	9.6%
No Answer	1	.2%
<b>Income</b>		
\$0-40,000/year	84	14.1%
\$40-60,000/year	100	16.8%
\$60-80,000/year	86	14.5%
\$80-100,000/year	64	10.8%
\$100-200,000/year	196	33%

\$200-300,000/year	42	7.1%
\$300-400,000/year	16	2.7%
>\$400,000/year	6	1.0%
<b>Geographical Location</b>		
Midwest	50	8.4%
Northeast	77	13%
South	384	64.6%
West	20	3.4%
U.S.	60	10.1%
Outside U.S.	2	0.3%
Other	1	0.2%

\*Other includes the following professions: Creative Arts, Ministry, Nonprofit, Sports & Entertainment, Cosmetologist, Counselor, Courier, Helping Others, Horse Training, Investigator, Letter Carrier, Massage Therapist, Personal Trainer, Music Producer, Youth Care Worker, Photography/Film Making, Driver, Hypnotherapist, Seamstress, Career Coach, Flight Attendant, Fitness Instructor, Trade Jobs and Government.

\*\*Not working is comprised of the following participants: Disabled, Housewife and Unemployed.

**Ethnic identity.** Having participants self-report their nationality, ethnicity and that of their parents was a part of the ethnic identity (EI) construct but it is being reported here since it is demographic information. Eighty-six percent (n=513) of the participants reported their nationality as American (see Table 8). Eighty-six percent of participants (n=511) reported their ethnicity as African American. Thirteen percent (n=78) of participants reported their ethnicity as Black. Almost one percent (n=5) of participants reported their ethnicity as Caribbean. Almost seventy-seven percent (n=456) of participants reported their father's ethnicity as African American. The second largest group reported their father's ethnicity as Black (n=93, 15.7%). Participants identifying their mothers' ethnicity as African American was almost identical (n=464, 78.1%) to the fathers. The second largest group reported their mother's ethnicity as Black (n=88, 14.8%).

Table 8

*Results from Participants Self-Reporting Their Ethnic Identity*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency (n=594)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Participants' Nationality</b>		
African	3	0.5%
African American	31	5.2%
American	513	86.4%
Black	18	3.0%
Caribbean	20	3.4%
Hispanic/Latino	2	0.3%
Native American	2	0.3%
North American	4	0.7%
White	1	0.2%
<b>Participants' Ethnicity</b>		
African American	511	86%
Black	78	13.1%
Caribbean	5	0.9%
<b>Father's Ethnicity</b>		
African	7	1.2%
African American	456	76.8%
American	1	0.2%
Bi/Multicultural	16	2.7%
Black	93	15.7%
Caribbean	12	2%
Caucasian	1	0.2%
Hispanic/Latino	4	0.7%
White	1	0.2%
Other	1	0.2%
No Answer	2	0.3%
<b>Mother's Ethnicity</b>		
African	5	0.8%
African American	464	78.1%
American	1	0.2%
Asian	1	0.2%
Bi/Multicultural	16	2.7%
Black	88	14.8%
Caribbean	14	2.4%
Caucasian	1	0.2%
Hispanic/Latino	1	0.2%
White	1	0.2%
Other	2	0.3%



## **Data Collection**

One of the objectives of this study was to collect data from an ethnically diverse set of participants to understand the effects of ethnicity on purchase behavior. In order to achieve this objective, the following nonprobability sampling techniques were used: convenience, snowball and quota. Respondents were initially recruited via email and/or direct messaging using the researcher's personal (over 2000) and professional (e.g., The PhD Project, Marketing Doctoral Student Association, etc.) contacts (i.e., convenience sampling). At the end of the online survey, participants were asked to identify others who belonged to the target populations (i.e., snowball sampling) and forward the website link to them (Malhotra, 2010). The researcher maintained a count of the number of surveys that came in to monitor ethnicity (i.e., quota sampling).

Data was collected online using Qualtrics' online survey software available through UNCG. The process for data collection was as follows:

1. An initial email or direct message (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and text messaging) was sent to personal and professional contacts. The message provided a brief description of the study in addition to prompting them to click on the link to the survey (see Appendix D for recruitment scripts).
2. The researcher sent follow-up communications as needed (approximately weekly) until the sample numbers were reached (see Appendix D).
3. The researcher also uploaded the survey link with a one-minute video to her social media outlets (i.e., Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn) detailing the study and prompting viewers (e.g., friends of friends, other levels of LinkedIn

contacts, view finder in Instagram, etc.) to take the survey and forward the link to others (<https://youtu.be/hsSpo0UJTDw> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsGZkgcjCUU>).

### **Survey Instrument Development**

A structured questionnaire was developed after an extant review of the literature. The questionnaire was comprised of the following variables: 1) normative CSII, 2) informational CSII, 3) social comparison orientation, 4) status consumption, 5) desire for unique consumer products, 6) ethnic identity and 7) demographic information (see Appendix A for example of main survey). Items for consumer preference for prominent brand markings were developed (see Appendix B), data was collected and analyzed, and items were finalized before the main survey was distributed.

### **Measures**

Table 9 provides examples of the major constructs employed in this study. Measurements were chosen that best reflected group and ethnic influences on consumer preference for prominent brands. Most items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree, except for items 1-4 of ethnic identity and demographic information.

**Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence.** The consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII) construct is a two-dimensional measure of a person's need to identify with or enhance their image in the opinion of significant others through acquisition and use of products and brands (i.e., normative influence); willingness to conform to others' expectations regarding their purchase decisions (i.e.,

normative influence); and tendency to learn about products and brands by observing others or seeking information from others (i.e., informational influence). Bearden et al. (1989) developed a scale to measure the dimensions of CSII which are normative interpersonal influence (normative CSII) and informational interpersonal influence (informational CSII). The original 12 items (eight normative items and four informational items) (see Appendix A, Section A) from Bearden et al. (1989) were adopted and measured on a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). Bearden et al. (1989) found the scale to have an acceptable level of reliability (normative CSII=.88; informational CSII=.82).

**Social comparison orientation.** Social comparison orientation (SCO) measures individual differences in comparison of one's abilities and opinions to others. Gibbons and B. Buunk (1999) created the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) scale in response to a lack in a validated measure assessing an individual's comparison orientation. The original 11 items were adopted (first six items measure ability; last five items measure opinions) (see Appendix A, Section B) from Gibbons and B. Buunk (1999). The authors originally measured the 11 items on a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). In this study, SCO was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree) instead of a 5-point scale. Gibbons and B. Buunk (1999) found the scale to have an acceptable level of reliability (.83).

**Status consumption.** Status consumption (SC) measures a person's consumption of products in order to increase their desired status. Eastman et al. (1999) created the SC

scale to meet the demand for a measurement that could determine which consumers' purchase behavior was motivated by their desire for status. The original five items were adopted (see Appendix A, Section C) from Eastman et al. (1999) and measured on a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). Eastman et al. (1999) found the scale to have an acceptable level of reliability (.86).

**Desire for unique consumer products.** Desire for unique consumer products (DUCP) measures the antecedents and consequences that increase consumers' desire to acquire and possess goods, services and experiences few others possess (Lynn & Harris, 1997). Lynn and Harris (1997) created the DUCP scale to meet the demand for a measurement that could determine which consumers' purchase behavior is motivated by the desire for uniqueness. The original eight items (see Appendix A, Section D) from Lynn and Harris (1997) were adopted for this study. The authors originally measured the eight items on a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). DUCP was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree) instead of a 5-point scale. Lynn and Harris (1997) found the scale to have an acceptable level of reliability (.78).

**Consumer preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM).** Since there was no pre-existing brand prominence measurement found in the literature, CPPBM measurement items were developed. The deductive approach was used to generate the items because it has a tendency to assure content validity (Churchill, 1979; Hinkin, 1998). This approach to item generation used Truex's (2016) definition of brand marking as a guide for developing items. As defined in Chapter I, a brand marking is defined as

“any combination of a name, slogan, logo, sounds or colors that visually identify a company, its products or services” (Truex, 2016). Items were also generated to describe a single behavior (Churchill, 1979; Hinkin, 1998).

The literature suggests there may be two levels of brand prominence (i.e., high and low) but we do not know for certain. The author of this dissertation added a third level, no preference for prominent brand markings, to the measurement. Using these levels of brand prominence as a guide, 15 items were generated (see Appendix B). The items were then sent to a couple of experts (i.e., one research methodology professor, one marketing professor, one retail professor) for review and were deemed appropriate based on content validity. CPPBM was measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree.

A pre-test of the scale was conducted using the snowball sampling method. The researcher created an anonymous link to the survey in Qualtrics and posted the link on her social media (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram). Three hundred and twenty three participants took the survey. The majority of the participants were Black (82.97%, n=268). A breakdown of the other participants is: Asian (1.24%; 4), Caucasian/White (12.38%, n=40) and Mixed (3.41%, n=11). As previously mentioned, since the bulk of the participants were of African descent in both the pre-test of the CPPBM scale and main survey, this group’s data (i.e., 268 data points) was chosen to analyze.

Two hundred and sixty-eight data points were examined for duplicate IP addresses using Excel 2010 to ensure participants did not take the survey more than once. Although the answers were different, four cases with duplicate IP addresses were

discovered and deleted. Next, the data were examined using SPSS 24 for missing values. Four cases had missing values so they were deleted. This left 260 cases to analyze. Next, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using SPSS 24. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 24 was then conducted using the final items from the EFA. Results of the analyses and final measurement items that were used in the main survey are explained in detail in Chapter IV. Final measurement items can also be found in Appendix A, Section E.

**Multigroup ethnic identity measure-revised.** The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) measurement is a two-dimensional measure of a person's effort to learn about their ethnic group, their participation in ethnic and cultural practices and their sense of commitment to their ethnic group. MEIM-R, is a revised version of Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) scale and was created to reduce the number of items needed to measure ethnic identity in order to increase its reliability and validity. In this dissertation, before answering the measurement items, participants were asked to self-identify their nationality; country, state or province they were born in; their ethnicity and the ethnicity of their parents (see Appendix A, Section F). After answering the self-identification items, they answered the original six items from Phinney and Ong's (2007) study. The six items were originally measured on a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). In this study, EI was measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree instead of a 5-point scale. Phinney and Ong (2007) found the dimensions of

MEIM-R to have an acceptable level of reliability (exploration=.76, commitment=.78; combined 6 items=.81).

**Demographics.** The types of demographic information collected in this study were: 1) age, 2) gender, 3) geographical location, 4) student status, 5) education level, 6) household income and 7) current profession/career (see Appendix A, Section G). Gender, student status, educational level and household income were assessed using categorical scales. Age was assessed using a ratio scale. Geographical location and profession were first grouped into categories and then assessed using categorical scales.

*Table 9*

*Examples of Measurement Items, Scales and Sources*

<b>Construct (# of items)</b>	<b>Example Items</b>	<b>Source</b>
Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (12 items)	<u>Normative CSII</u> It is important that others like the products and brands I buy. <u>Informational CSII</u> I consult other people to help choose the best brand available.	Bearden et al. (1989)
Social Comparison Orientation (11 items)	<u>Abilities</u> I am not the type of person who compares myself with others. <u>Opinions</u> I like to talk with others about mutual opinions and experiences.	Gibbons & B. Buunk (1999)
Status Consumption (5 items)	I buy a product just because it has status.	Eastman et al. (1999)
Desire for Unique Consumer Products (8 items)	I am attracted to rare objects.	Lynn & Harris (1997)

Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings (8 items)	<u>High Preference for Prominent Brand Markings</u> I tend to buy brands with a trademark on the outside. <u>Low Preference for Prominent Brand Markings</u> I prefer products with unique design features on the outside. <u>No Preference for Prominent Brand Markings</u> I do not purchase products from companies that use trademarks or unique design features.	Developed by author of this dissertation
Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (6 items plus ethnic self-labeling and parental ethnic labeling)	<u>Exploration</u> I do things that will help me understand my ethnic background better.  <u>Commitment</u> I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.	Phinney & Ong (2007)

### **Pre-test of Main Survey**

Before the main survey was distributed, it was pre-tested. An anonymous URL was generated using Qualtrics' online survey software and sent to 50 participants of various ethnicities, ages and professions. Thirty-five completed surveys were returned. The last question of the survey asked participants to provide "your experience on taking the survey as well as any items and/or sections of the survey you feel should be edited to improve the survey". Participants' feedback was used to strengthen the understanding of several questions. Details of the feedback and revisions made to the main survey are in Appendix C.

### **Method of Analysis**

Structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS 24 statistical software was used to test the proposed research framework and coinciding hypotheses because it



allows a researcher to test the measurement and causal models at the same time. Two-step modeling was used to test the proposed model (Kline, 2011). First, the researcher conducted an individual CFA of each construct in the measurement model (see Appendix E for results of each construct). The results from each CFA were then used to conduct a CFA of the measurement model. Factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to examine the measurement model's convergent validity. Reliability of the measurement was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). The CFA was acceptable so the proposed causal model was tested (see Table 14). Specifically, the exogenous constructs (i.e., independent variables), normative CSII, informational CSII and SCO were tested to see if they were antecedents of the endogenous construct (i.e., dependent variable) status consumption. Social comparison orientation was tested to see if it is an antecedent of the endogenous construct desire for unique consumer products. Status consumption and desire for unique consumer products were tested to see if they are antecedents of the endogenous construct consumer preference for prominent brand markings. The ethnic identity construct was tested as a moderator to examine its effects on the relationships between 1) normative CSII and status consumption as well as 2) informational CSII and status consumption. The results of these analyses are discussed in detail in Chapter IV. A summary of the answers for each measurement variable can be found in Appendix F.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The findings chapter is divided into three sections. The first section discusses results from the exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory factory analyses (CFA) conducted to finalize the consumer preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM) scale. The second section discusses how data collected in the main survey was prepared before CFA and SEM analyses were conducted. The third section provides results from the CFA of the measurement model as well as results of hypotheses testing using structural equation modeling (SEM).

#### **Results from Testing Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings' Scale**

##### **Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis**

Before conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the determinant of the correlation matrix, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure were examined. The determinant was .004 which is greater than the threshold of .00001. KMO was .796 which is greater than the threshold of .50 and less than 1.0. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2=1418.62$ ,  $df=105$ ,  $p<.000$ ). These results indicated the data were suitable for factor analysis.

After concluding the data were suitable for analysis, the EFA was conducted in SPSS 24 using the principle axis factoring extraction method and promax rotation method. This extraction method was used instead of principle component analysis (PCA) for the following reasons:

- Seeks the least number of factors which account for the common variance (correlation) of a set of variables (Malhotra, 2010; Ngure, Kihoro, & Waititu, 2015).
- Takes into account measurement errors (the variance not attributable to the factor an observed variable) and thus does not produce initial communalities as one (Malhotra, 2010; Ngure et al., 2015).
- Able to recover weaker factors from weaker factor loadings (Malhotra, 2010; Ngure et al., 2015).
- Discovers the structure instead of determining it like principal components analysis (PCA) (Malhotra, 2010; Ngure et al., 2015).
- Removes the unique and error variance making its results much more reliable (Malhotra, 2010; Ngure et al., 2015).

Items were retained based on Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson's (2010) recommendation that factor loadings should be greater than .50 and preferably .70 or greater. Items were also determined a priori because it was expected the factors would match the three levels of brand prominence suggested by Han et al. (2010); high, low and none. The initial EFA (see Table 10) showed two of the high preference for prominent brand markings' items, HighPPBM4 and HighPPBM5, loaded on the third factor instead

of the first factor with the other HighPPBM items. Another item loaded on the third factor and it was NoPPBM4 and not on factor two along with the other no preference for prominent brand markings' items. Since these three items did not load on the same factors as their respective items and had different meanings, they were deleted one by one starting with HighPPBM4, then HighPPBM5 and then NoPPBM4. After these items were deleted, there were four items (LowPPBM3, LowPPBM4, LowPPBM5 and NoPPBM1) with loadings < .50. Each of these items were deleted one by one starting with LowPPBM3, then LowPPBM4, then LowPPBM5 and lastly, NoPPBM1. The deletion of these seven items left eight items and supported the three dimensions (i.e., high, low and no preference) suggested by Han et al.

(2010) (see Table 11 and Figure 7).

*Table 10*

*Results of Initial Exploratory Factor Analysis on CPPBM Scale*

<b>Measured Variables</b>	<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Factor 2</b>	<b>Factor 3</b>	<b>Factor 4</b>
<b>HighPPBM1</b>	.64			
<b>HighPPBM2</b>	.95			
<b>HighPPBM3</b>	.68			
<b>HighPPBM4</b>			<b>.60*</b>	
<b>HighPPBM5</b>			<b>.74*</b>	
<b>LowPPBM1</b>				.76
<b>LowPPBM2</b>				.87
<b>LowPPBM3</b>				<b>.41**</b>
<b>LowPPBM4</b>				<b>.31**</b>
<b>LowPPBM5</b>				<b>.06**</b>
<b>NoPPBM1<sup>a</sup></b>		<b>.30**</b>		
<b>NoPPBM2<sup>a</sup></b>		.74		
<b>NoPPBM3<sup>a</sup></b>		.60		
<b>NoPPBM4<sup>a</sup></b>			<b>.61*</b>	
<b>NoPPBM5<sup>a</sup></b>		.78		

<b>Eigenvalue</b>	4.79	1.74	1.59	1.07
<b>% of Variance</b>	31.91%	11.63%	10.57%	7.13%
<b>Cumulative %</b>	31.91%	43.54%	54.11%	61.24%

\*Items deleted due to loading on same factor but had different meanings. \*\*Items deleted because factor loadings were <.50. <sup>a</sup>Reverse coded item. (N=260)

*Table 11*

*Final CPPBM Measurement Items*

<b>Description</b>	<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Factor 2</b>	<b>Factor 3</b>
1. I tend to buy products with a trademark on the outside. (HighPPBM1)	.67		
2. I prefer products with a trademark on the outside. (HighPPBM2)	.98		
3. I prefer the trademark to be on the outside of the products I buy rather than inside. (HighPPBM3)	.74		
4. I tend to buy products with unique design features on the outside. (LowPPBM1)			.97
5. I prefer products with unique design features on the outside. (LowPPBM2)			.71
6. I do not buy products with a trademark or unique design features on the outside. (NoPPBM2_R) <sup>a</sup>		.63	
7. I do not wear or carry apparel and accessories with trademarks or unique design features. (NoPPBM3_R) <sup>a</sup>		.66	
8. I do not purchase products from companies that use trademarks or unique design features. (NoPPBM5_R) <sup>a</sup>		.85	
<b>Eigenvalue</b>	3.34	1.47	1.20
<b>% of Variance</b>	41.76%	18.41%	15.05%
<b>Cumulative %</b>	41.76%	60.17%	75.22%
<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>	.84	.75	.82

Note. Principle axis factoring with promax rotation. <sup>a</sup>Reverse coded items. (N=260)

### **Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

Next, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 24 to confirm the eight items found in the EFA (see

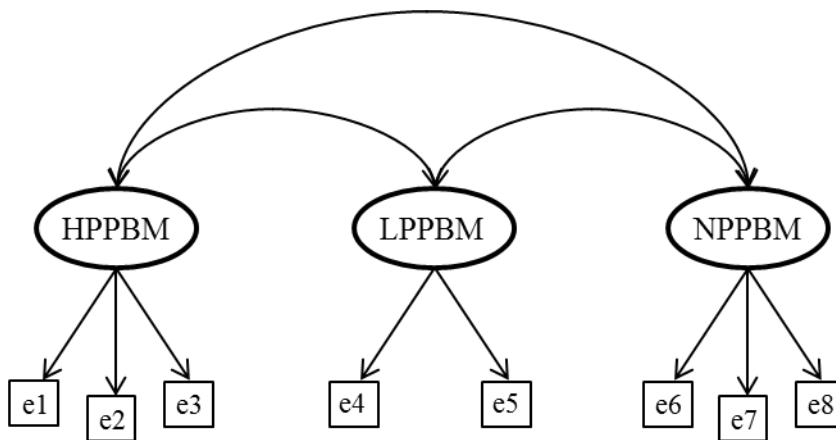
Table 12). Goodness-of-fit (GOF) was determined using Hair et al.'s (2010) guidelines ((less than 12 observed variables; comparative fit index (CFI)=.95/>; Tucker Lewis index (TLI)=.95/>; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) <.07 with CFI=.97/>)). A specification search that included a review of factor loadings, standardized residual covariances and modification indices showed no significant issues with the construct. Examination of fit indices showed model fit was good ( $\chi^2=37.29$ ,  $df=17$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.003$ ,  $TLI=.96$ ,  $CFI=.97$ ,  $RMSEA=.068$ ). The normed  $\chi^2$  was 2.19. While a normed  $\chi^2$  smaller than 2.0 is preferred, if the number is between 2.0 and 5.0 it is considered to be acceptable (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Thus, the normed  $\chi^2$  of the CFA for the CPPBM scale suggests acceptable fit.

After fit was established, validity checks (i.e., convergent validity, reliability and discriminant validity) were conducted on the measurement model. All of the measurement items had factor loadings greater than the .50 rule of thumb (see Table 12) suggesting convergence of the items on their respective constructs (Hair et al., 2010). The AVEs (see Table 12) for all of the latent variables (i.e., high, low and no preference) in the CPPBM construct were also greater than .50, further suggesting convergence of the CPPBM measurement (Hair et al., 2010).

Next, the CPPBM scale was assessed for reliability. Cronbach's alpha for high, low and no preference for prominent brand markings were greater than .70 (see Table 12). CR for high and low preference for prominent brand markings was greater than .70 but the CR for no preference for prominent brand markings was .63 (see Table 12). This was not seen to be an issue because the CR for no preference for prominent brand

markings was above the minimum rule of thumb (.60) (Hair et al., 2010). The assessments of reliability for the CPPBM construct lead to the conclusion that the eight measurement items represent the construct.

Discriminant validity was the last test conducted to assess validity of the CPPBM measurement. All of the AVEs (on the diagonal in bold) were greater than their corresponding squared, inter-construct correlation estimates (above the diagonal) in Table 13 (Hair et al., 2010). These results indicate the three dimensions of CPPBM are distinctly different from each other suggesting discriminant validity.



*Figure 7. Final CPPBM Measurement Model.*

Table 12

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of CPPBM Scale*

Variables	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	t-value
<u>High Preference for Prominent Brand Markings</u> (Cronbach's $\alpha=.84$ , CR <sup>a</sup> =.78, AVE <sup>b</sup> =.65)			
1. I tend to buy products with a trademark on the outside.	.74	-	-
2. I prefer products with a trademark on the outside.	.95	.10	12.78*
3. I prefer the trademark to be on the outside of the products I buy rather than inside.	.71	.09	11.35*
<u>Low Preference for Prominent Brand Markings</u> (Cronbach's $\alpha=.75$ , CR=.81, AVE=.74)			
1. I tend to buy products with unique design features on the outside.	.72	-	-
2. I prefer products with unique design features on the outside.	.98	.20	7.11*
<u>No Preference for Prominent Brand Markings</u> (Cronbach's $\alpha=.82$ , CR=.63, AVE=.52)			
1. I do not buy products with a trademark or unique design features on the outside. <sup>c</sup>	.66	-	-
2. I do not wear or carry apparel and accessories with trademarks or unique design features. <sup>c</sup>	.67	.13	8.45*
3. I do not purchase products from companies that use trademarks or unique design features. <sup>c</sup>	.83	.13	8.64*
Model fit ( $\chi^2=37.29$ , $df=17$ , p-value=.003, RMSEA=.068, TLI=.96, CFI=.97). Note. <sup>a</sup> Construct reliability, <sup>b</sup> Average variance extracted, <sup>c</sup> Reverse coded items, * $p < 0.001$ . (N=260)			



Table 13

*Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of CPPBM Scale*

Variable	Mean	SD	HighPPBM	LowPPBM	NoPPBM
HighPPBM	3.84	1.65	<b>.65</b>	.19	.15
LowPPBM	4.48	1.52	.44	<b>.74</b>	.08
NoPPBM	4.98	1.41	.39	.29	<b>.52</b>

Note. Values below the diagonal are correlation estimates among variables. Values on the diagonal in bold are the average variance extracted (AVE) values. Values above the diagonal are the squared correlation estimates. (N=260)

### **Preparation of Data Collected in Main Survey**

Several steps were taken before analyzing the 619 data points collected. First, open-ended questions in the ethnic identity and demographics sections were coded and grouped into categories. Next, data were examined for duplicate IP addresses. Four duplicate addresses were found and deleted to reduce the possibility of someone taking the survey twice. Next, data were checked for missing values. Eight cases had missing values so they were deleted. These eight cases also happened to be all of the participants who self-identified their ethnicity and nationality as African. This left the following participants of African descent: African American, Black and Caribbean. After deleting cases with missing values, the data were examined to see if participants were engaged in the survey. Standard deviations were calculated using Excel 2010 and then used to check participant engagement. Review of the data showed all participants were engaged in the survey meaning no participants were found to have provided the same answer(s) on each question. Lastly, data were checked for outliers using AMOS 24. A threshold of  $p < .005$

was used (Hair et al., 2010). Thirteen outlying cases were found and deleted. This left 594 usable responses yielding a response rate of 96% (out of 619 data points).

After the data was prepared, an individual CFA of each construct was conducted to see if any measurement items had significant issues before a CFA of the final measurement was conducted (see Appendices E for results). Items were retained and/or deleted using the following specification search criteria: covariances in the modification indices  $>20$  and modifying less than 20% of the measured variables (Hair et al., 2010). Model fit was assessed using Hair et al.'s (2010) criteria that when there are more than 30 measurement variables (conceptual model had 50 measurement variables), model fit is a good when  $RMSEA = .07$  or less,  $CFI > .90$  and  $TLI > .90$ .

Two items were deleted when a specification search was conducted. Item NCSII1 was deleted from the normative CSII measurement (see Appendix E “Normative Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence”). Several NCSII items were also covaried. The second item, SCOO5, was deleted from the social comparison orientation measurement (see Appendix E “Social Comparison Orientation”). A detailed explanation of why these items were deleted and covaried can be found in Appendix E.

Convergent validity was assessed by examining whether or not standardized factor loadings and AVE values were greater than .50. Reliability was assessed by examining whether or not Cronbach's alphas and CR values were greater than .70. Discriminant validity was assessed by the AVE values being greater than their corresponding squared correlation estimates.

## **Structural Equation Modeling**

Structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS 24 was employed to test the hypotheses created in this dissertation. Following Hair et al.'s (2010) two-step approach, the fit of the measurement model was assessed first. After finding an adequate fit of the measurement model, the structural model was tested. Next, the measurement model was converted into a structural model. Lastly, the structural model was assessed for fit before hypotheses were tested.

### **Results of CFA on Measurement Model**

Based on the individual CFAs conducted in the preliminary analysis (see Appendix E), the measurement model consists of the following seven latent constructs: 1) normative CSII, 2) informational CSII, 3) social comparison orientation (SCO), 4) status consumption (SC), 5) desire for unique consumer products (DUCP), 6) consumer preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM) and 7) ethnic identity (EI). Normative CSII and informational CSII were tested as separate constructs although they are part of the CSII construct. The social comparison orientation, consumer preference for prominent brand markings and ethnic identity constructs has more than one dimension so second-order factor analysis was used to preserve the theoretical foundation upon which these constructs were created.

The initial CFA of the measurement model resulted in good model fit ( $\chi^2=2130.51$ ,  $df=1049$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.000$ ,  $TLI=.91$ ,  $CFI=.92$ ,  $RMSEA=.042$ ). A specification search was conducted to ensure there were no glaring issues with measurement items even though model fit was acceptable. Item ICSII1 from the informational CSII items

cross loaded with numerous measurement items and had very high standardized residual covariances and covariances (found in modification indices). Therefore, it was deleted from the measurement model. Final model fit was stronger ( $\chi^2=1942.16$ ,  $df=1003$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.000$ ,  $TLI=.92$ ,  $CFI=.93$ ,  $RMSEA=.040$ ) than the initial model fit. The normed  $\chi^2$  was 1.93 which is below the 2.0 rule of thumb further suggesting the fit of the measurement model was good (Hair et al., 2010).

After fit was established, validity checks were conducted on the measurement model. Forty-five (96%) of the 47 measurement variables had factor loadings greater than .50 (see Table 14) suggesting convergence of the items on their respective constructs. AVE (see Table 14) for the social comparison orientation, status consumption and desire for unique consumer products constructs were a little less than the .50 rule of thumb (Hair et al., 2010). However, the AVE for the majority of the constructs (i.e., normative CSII, informational CSII, consumer preference for prominent brand markings and ethnic identity) were greater than .50 suggesting adequate convergent validity of the measurement model. Next, the measurement model was assessed for reliability. Cronbach's alpha (see Table 14) for all of the constructs was greater than .70 indicating the measurement model is reliable. CR for each construct was greater than .70 except for informational CSII (.63) (see Table 14). Overall, the measurement model had adequate reliability.

Discriminant validity was the last test conducted to assess validity of the measurement model. The AVE (see the bold numbers on the diagonal in Table 15) for each construct was greater than their corresponding squared correlations' estimates (see

the numbers above the diagonal in Table 15). Since the measurement model met the indicators for convergent validity, reliability and discriminant validity, it was concluded the researcher could move on to converting the CFA measurement model into a structural model so hypotheses could be tested.

Table 14

## Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Measurement Model

Variables (N=594)	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	t-value
<b><u>Normative CSII (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math>=.88, CR=.79, AVE=.51)</u></b>			
X <sub>1</sub> : It is important that others like the products and brands I buy.	.70	-	-
X <sub>2</sub> : When buying products, I purchase brands I think others will approve of.	.74	.05	21.88
X <sub>3</sub> : If people I frequently interact with will see me using a certain product, I purchase the brand they expect me to buy.	.74	.06	16.19
X <sub>4</sub> : I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.	.73	.09	15.97
X <sub>5</sub> : I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.	.77	.07	16.75
X <sub>6</sub> : If I want to be like someone, I try to buy the same brands they buy.	.60	.07	13.36
X <sub>7</sub> : I identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they do.	.68	.07	14.77
<b><u>Informational CSII (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math>=.76, CR=.63, AVE=.52)</u></b>			
X <sub>8</sub> : If I have little experience with a brand, I ask someone I trust (ex. family, friends, store clerk) about the brand.	.70	-	-
X <sub>9</sub> : I gather information from friends or family about a brand before I buy.	.81	.09	13.91
X <sub>10</sub> : I consult other people (ex. store clerk, social media sites, authors of product reviews in magazines) to help me choose the best brand available.	.65	.08	13.04
<b><u>Social Comparison Orientation (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math>=.82, CR=.80, AVE=.46)</u></b>			
<b><u>Abilities</u></b>			
X <sub>11</sub> : I compare how my loved ones (ex. friends, family, partner/significant other, etc.) are doing with how others who are not as close to me are doing.	.61	-	-
X <sub>12</sub> : I pay a lot of attention to how I do things compared with how others do things.	.62	.09	12.14
X <sub>13</sub> : If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with how well others have done.	.72	.10	13.61
X <sub>14</sub> : I compare how I am doing socially (ex. social skills, popularity) with other people.	.76	.09	14.04

X <sub>15</sub> : I am not the type of person who compares myself with others. <sup>a</sup>	.46	.09	9.54
X <sub>16</sub> : I compare myself with others with respect to what I have accomplished in life.	.70	.10	13.36
<u>Opinions</u>			
X <sub>17</sub> : I like to talk with others who share similar opinions and experiences to mine.	.48	-	-
X <sub>18</sub> : I try to find out what others in a similar situation would do.	.86	.17	11.52
X <sub>19</sub> : I like to know what others in a similar situation would do.	.89	.17	11.54
X <sub>20</sub> : If I want to learn more about something, I try to find out what others think about it.	.54	.15	9.44
<b><u>Status Consumption</u></b> (Cronbach's $\alpha$ =.84, CR=.74, AVE=.45)			
Y <sub>1</sub> : I buy a product just because it has status.	.82	-	-
Y <sub>2</sub> : I am interested in new products with status.	.82	.05	21.77
Y <sub>3</sub> : I pay more for a product if it has status.	.77	.06	20.20
Y <sub>4</sub> : The status of a product is irrelevant to me. <sup>a</sup>	.55	.07	13.50
Y <sub>5</sub> : I think products with some snob appeal are valuable.	.64	.06	15.97
<b><u>Desire for Unique Consumer Products</u></b> (Cronbach's $\alpha$ =.85, CR=.86, AVE=.41)			
Y <sub>6</sub> : I am attracted to rare objects.	.60	-	-
Y <sub>7</sub> : I tend to be a fashion leader rather than a fashion follower.	.63	.10	12.12
Y <sub>8</sub> : I tend to buy a product if it is scarce.	.70	.10	13.17
Y <sub>9</sub> : I prefer to have things custom-made than to have them ready-made.	.56	.09	11.17
Y <sub>10</sub> : I enjoy having things that others do not.	.70	.10	13.10
Y <sub>11</sub> : I do not pass up the opportunity to order custom features on the products I buy.	.64	.09	12.32
Y <sub>12</sub> : I try new products and services before others do.	.61	.09	11.86
Y <sub>13</sub> : I shop at stores that carry merchandise which is different and unusual.	.68	.09	12.89
<b><u>Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings</u></b> (Cronbach's $\alpha$ =.80, CR=.92, AVE=.67)			
<u>High Preference</u>			
Y <sub>14</sub> : I tend to buy products with a trademark on the outside.	.82	-	-
Y <sub>15</sub> : I prefer products with a trademark on the outside.	.97	.04	25.91
Y <sub>16</sub> : I prefer the trademark to be on the outside of the products I buy rather than inside.	.78	.04	21.93
<u>Low Preference</u>			
Y <sub>17</sub> : I tend to buy products with unique design features on the outside.	.82	-	-

Y <sub>18</sub> : I prefer products with unique design features on the outside.	.84	.06	15.50
<u>No Preference</u>			
Y <sub>19</sub> : I do not buy products with a trademark or unique design features on the outside. <sup>a</sup>	.65	-	-
Y <sub>20</sub> : I do not wear or carry apparel and accessories with trademarks or unique design features. <sup>a</sup>	.94	.10	14.20
Y <sub>21</sub> : I do not purchase products from companies that use trademarks or unique design features. <sup>a</sup>	.70	.06	14.60
<b><u>Ethnic Identity</u></b> (Cronbach's $\alpha$ =.89, CR=.90, AVE=.69)			
<u>Exploration</u>			
Y <sub>22</sub> : I spend time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions and customs.	.77	-	-
Y <sub>23</sub> : I do things that will help me understand my ethnic background better.	.88	.05	21.07
Y <sub>24</sub> : I talk to other people in order to learn more about my ethnic group.	.74	.05	18.11
<u>Commitment</u>			
Y <sub>25</sub> : I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.	.88	-	-
Y <sub>26</sub> : I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.	.86	.03	26.64
Y <sub>27</sub> : I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.	.83	.03	25.34
Model fit ( $\chi^2=1942.16$ , $df=1003$ , $p\text{-value}=.000$ , $TLI=.92$ , $CFI=.93$ , $RMSEA=.040$ ). <sup>a</sup> Reverse coded item. Note: Item ICSII1 ("I identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they do.") was deleted.			



Table 15

*Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of Measurement Model*

Variable	Mean	SD	NCSII	ICSII	SCO	SC	DUCP	CPPBM	EI
NCSII	2.16	1.45	<b>.51</b>	.10	.45	.48	.005	.15	.004
ICSII	4.84	1.67	.32	<b>.72</b>	.28	.05	.01	.07	.04
SCO	4.03	1.58	.67	.53	<b>.46</b>	.37	.01	.16	.01
SC	2.74	1.63	.69	.22	.61	<b>.45</b>	.06	.34	.01
DUCP	4.16	1.65	.07	.11	.12	.24	<b>.41</b>	.01	.04
CPPBM	4.12	1.55	.39	.26	.40	.58	.71	<b>.67</b>	.008
EI	5.72	1.30	-.06	.21	.12	-.09	.21	.17	<b>.69</b>

Note. Values below the diagonal are correlation estimates among variables. Values on the diagonal in bold are the average variance extracted (AVE) values. Values above the diagonal are the squared correlation estimates. (N=594)

### Results of Testing Structural Model

To test hypotheses in the original model (see Figure 8a), AMOS 24 was used to convert the CFA of the measurement model into a full latent variable, structural equation model (SEM). The moderator (i.e., ethnic identity) was tested in AMOS 24 using a technique by Ping (1995). Steps 1 and 2 were completed in SPSS 24. Cortina, Chen, and Dunlap (2001) provide the following procedure for testing a moderator (interaction) effect:

- **Step 1:** Standardize all indicators for the independent variables (NCSII, ICSII, EI).
- **Step 2:** Create interaction terms (NCSII\_x\_EI, ICSII\_x\_EI).
- **Step 3:** Create paths from the latent moderating variables (EI) and interaction terms (NCSII\_x\_EI, ICSII\_x\_EI) to the dependent variable (status consumption).

- **Step 4:** Covary all of the independent variables including the latent moderating variables and interaction terms.

It should be noted this technique called for creating a path between ethnic identity and status consumption (Step 3). This is why this relationship was added to the model and discussed in Chapters IV and V.

The initial SEM analysis with maximum likelihood method showed the model to have good fit ( $\chi^2=2174.33$ ,  $df=1095$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.000$ ,  $TLI=.93$ ,  $CFI=.93$ ,  $RMSEA=.041$ ). Normed  $\chi^2$  was 1.98. Goodness of fit was assessed using the following rules of thumb by Hair et al. (2010): sample size >250, a TLI >.90, a CFI >.90, RMSEA being <.07 and a normed  $\chi^2$  less than 2 (preferably) but no more than 5 (for adequate fit). Review of the modification indices suggested the following paths be added to the model: DUCP→SC and normative CSII→high CPPBM. These paths seemed logical in the light of previous studies and theoretical considerations so these paths were added one by one.

The first path added to the model was DUCP→SC. This path suggests a consumer's desire for unique products influences their status consumption behavior. Clark et al. (2007) conducted a study that found a consumer's need for uniqueness had a positive, direct influence on status consumption. Based on the findings from Clark et al.'s (2007) study, a path between DUCP and SC was added. Adding the path between DUCP and SC did improve model fit.

The next path added to the model was normative CSII→high CPPBM. This path suggests consumers who are highly influenced by people they spend a lot of time and have close relationships with will most likely choose a product with a brand marking that

has been placed on the outside of the item. This relationship seems logical because of normative CSII's direct effect on status consumption. Those consumers who consume status goods have a higher preference for prominent brand markings.

After the suggested paths were added, a specification search found several high residuals (greater than 2.5) between several of the high preference (HighPPBM) and no preference (NoPPBM) for prominent brand markings' items. Modification indices also showed a high covariance between the error terms of these two constructs. Since HighPPBM and NoPPBM are a part of the overall consumer preference for prominent brand markings measurement but loaded on separate factors, a decision was made to covary the error terms between them. Covarying the error terms of the HighPPBM and NoPPBM dimensions in addition to all of the other modifications made to the model produced a structural model with fairly good fit ( $\chi^2=2055.37$ ,  $df=1092$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.000$ ,  $TLI=.94$ ,  $CFI=.94$ ,  $RMSEA=.039$ ). The normed  $\chi^2$  was 1.84 which is under the 2.0 rule of thumb further providing evidence the alternate model had good fit. This alternate model was adopted to test the hypotheses. Figure 8b shows how the alternate model is different from the original conceptual model.

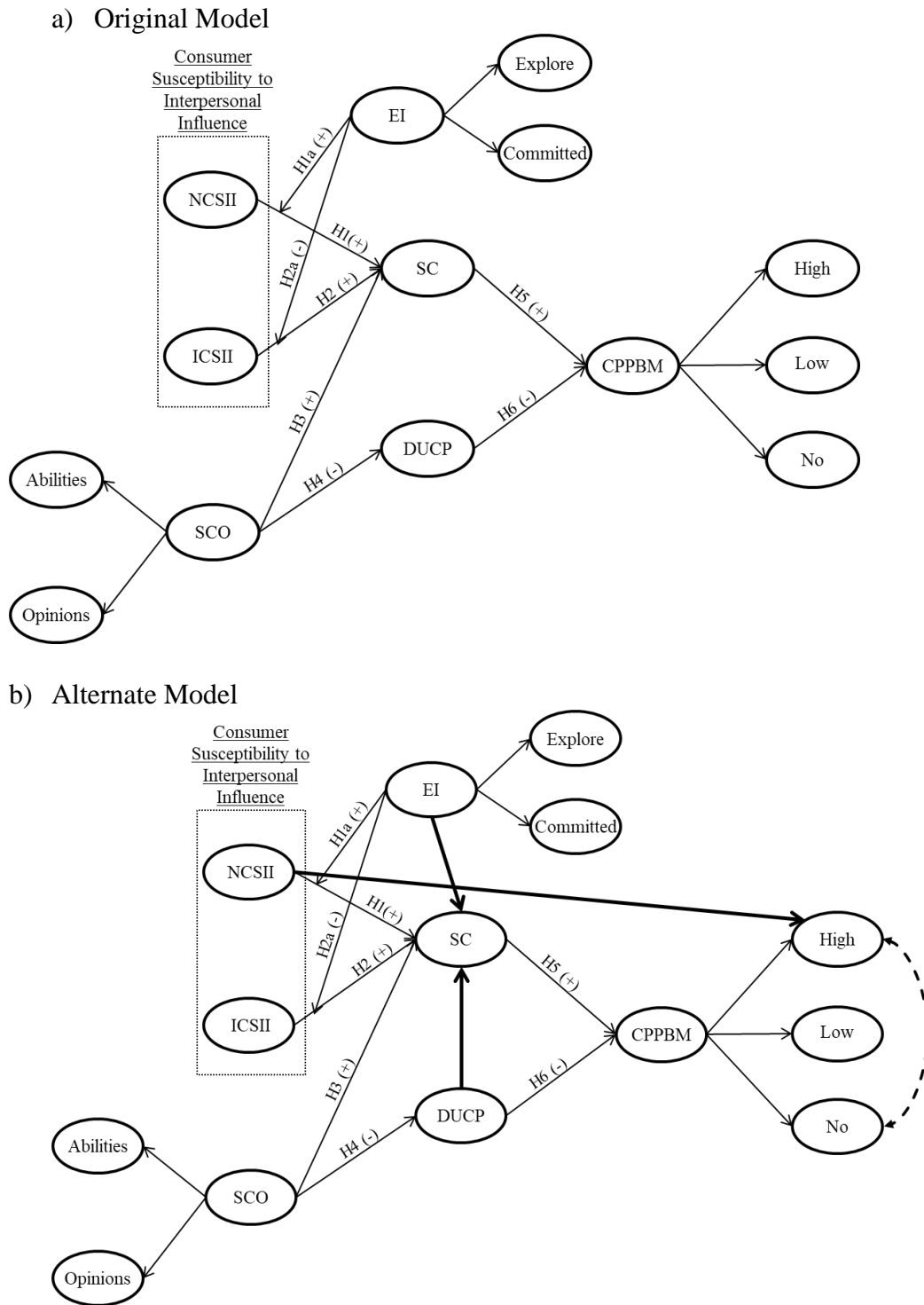


Figure 8. The Original Model and Alternate Model.

## Results of Hypotheses Testing

Figure 9 illustrates the results of the hypotheses in the alternate structural model. H1 posited consumers high in normative CSII would tend to choose a product and/or brand that allows them to show their status whether it is actual or implied. H1 was not supported (standardized estimate= -.18,  $p=.016$ ) (see Table 16). H1a posited the relationship between normative CSII and status consumption would be stronger in consumers with *higher* ethnic identity. Results supported H1a. The moderating effect of ethnic identity was positive and statistically significant as predicted (standardized estimate=.65,  $p=.000$ ) (see Table 16).

H2 proposed consumers high in informational CSII would purchase status goods. H2 was supported (standardized estimate=.38,  $p=.000$ ) (see Table 16). H2a posited the relationship between informational CSII and status consumption would be stronger in consumers with *lower* ethnic identity. This hypothesis was supported. The moderating effect of ethnic identity was negative and statistically significant as predicted (standardized estimate= -.54,  $p=.000$ ) (see Table 16).

H3 posited social comparison orientation would have a positive effect on status consumption. Results supported H3. A person who is high in social comparison has a tendency to consume status goods (standardized estimate=.36,  $p=.000$ ) (see Table 16). H4 proposed social comparison orientation would have a negative effect on desire for unique consumer products. H4 was not supported. A consumer's social comparison orientation had a positive effect on their desire for unique consumer products (standardized estimate=.14,  $p=.007$ ) (see Table 16).

H5 proposed status consumption would have a positive effect on consumer preference for prominent brand markings. This hypothesis was supported. A person's status consumption behavior does influence their preference for prominent brand markings (standardized estimate=.24,  $p=.000$ ) (see Table 16). H6 posited desire for unique consumer products would have a negative influence on CPPBM. This hypothesis was not supported. Desire for unique consumer products had a positive influence on preference for prominent brand markings (standardized estimate=.65,  $p=.000$ ) (see Table 16) instead of negative as predicted. Next, the results of the added paths (i.e.,  $EI \rightarrow SC$ ,  $DUCP \rightarrow SC$  and normative  $CSII \rightarrow HighCPPBM$ ) are discussed.

The path,  $EI \rightarrow SC$  that was created to test the moderating effect of ethnic identity, indicates a person's ethnic identification negatively impacts their consumption of status goods (standardized estimate= -.14,  $p=.036$ ) (see Table 16). The next path,  $DUCP \rightarrow SC$ , indicated a person's desire for unique products influences their consumption of status goods (standardized estimate=.19,  $p=.000$ ) (see Table 16). The last path, normative  $CSII \rightarrow HighCPPBM$ , indicated consumers highly susceptible to normative influence also have a high preference for prominent brand markings (standardized estimate=.25,  $p=.000$ ) (see Table 16). The results of second-order factoring are also shown in Figure 9 and Table 16. However, they are not discussed because they were not part of the original conceptual framework.

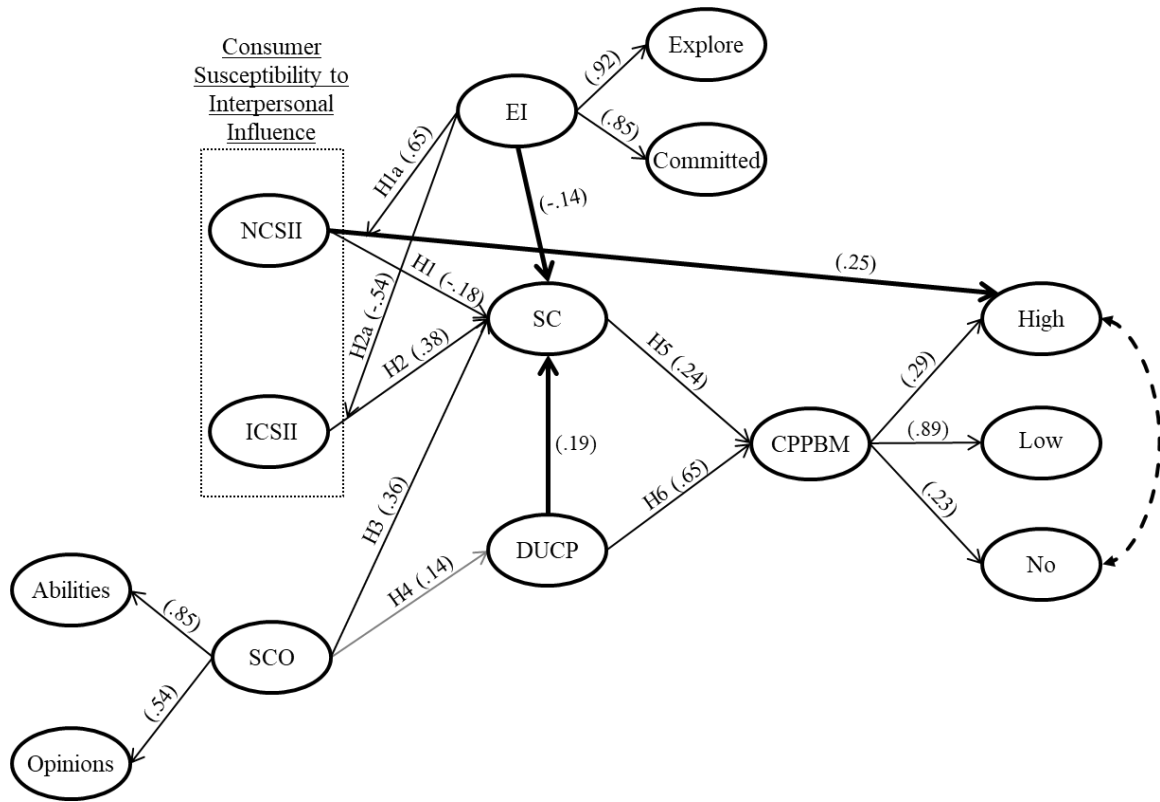


Figure 9. Alternate Model with Results of Hypothesized Relationships. Model fit ( $\chi^2=2055.37$ ,  $df=1092$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.000$ ,  $TLI=.94$ ,  $CFI=.94$ ,  $RMSEA=.039$ ). Bolded lines indicate paths not hypothesized. Dashed, curved line indicates covarying the error terms between the HighPPBM and NoPPBM factors.

Table 16

Results of Hypotheses, Added Paths and Second-Order Factoring

Relationship	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Hypothesis Supported?
<b>H1: NCSII→SC<sup>b</sup></b>	-.18	.07	-2.42	.016	No <sup>b</sup>
<b>H1a: NCSII x EI→SC</b>	.65	.02	6.14	.000	Yes
<b>H2: ICSII→SC</b>	.38	.09	4.24	.000	Yes
<b>H2a: ICSII x EI→SC</b>	-.54	.02	-4.06	.000	Yes
<b>H3: SCO→SC</b>	.36	.13	3.67	.000	Yes
<b>H4: SCO→DUCP<sup>b</sup></b>	.14	.06	2.70	.007	No <sup>b</sup>
<b>H5: SC→CPPBM</b>	.24	.02	3.62	.000	Yes
<b>H6: DUCP→CPPBM<sup>b</sup></b>	.65	.06	4.75	.000	No <sup>b</sup>

<b>DUCP→SC<sup>a</sup></b>	.19	.05	5.00	.000	<sup>a</sup>
<b>NCSII→High CPPBM<sup>a</sup></b>	.25	.05	6.96	.000	<sup>a</sup>
<b>EI→SC<sup>c</sup></b>	-.14	.07	-2.10	.036	<sup>c</sup>
<b>SCO→Abilities<sup>d</sup></b>	.85	-	-	.000	<sup>d</sup>
<b>SCO→Opinions<sup>d</sup></b>	.54	.05	7.08	.000	<sup>d</sup>
<b>EI→Exploration<sup>d</sup></b>	.92	-	-	.000	<sup>d</sup>
<b>EI→Commitment<sup>d</sup></b>	.85	.04	19.00	.000	<sup>d</sup>
<b>CPPBM→HighPPBM<sup>d</sup></b>	.29	-	-	.000	<sup>d</sup>
<b>CPPBM→LowPPBM<sup>d</sup></b>	.89	.62	4.97	.000	<sup>d</sup>
<b>CPPBM→NoPPBM<sup>d</sup></b>	.25	.13	4.10	.000	<sup>d</sup>

Model fit ( $\chi^2=2055.37$ ,  $df=1092$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.000$ ,  $TLI=.94$ ,  $CFI=.94$ ,  $RMSEA=.039$ ). Note: A threshold of  $p<.10$  (90% confidence interval) was used to retain relationships.

<sup>a</sup>Additional path suggested by modification indices but not hypothesized. <sup>b</sup>H1 was not supported because it was hypothesized as positive. H4 and H6 were not supported because both were hypothesized as negative. <sup>c</sup>Path added to test moderating effect.

<sup>d</sup>Results of second-order factoring. (N=594)

## Summary

This chapter provided an analysis of the survey responses for consumer preference for prominent brand markings' scale and conceptual framework. Hypotheses were tested based on the SEM that was created from the CFA measurement model. Fit for the CFA and SEM was acceptable. Based on the SEM analysis, five of the eight hypotheses were supported (H1a, H2, H2a, H3 and H5). Also, three additional paths (EI→SC, DUCP→SC and normative CSII→HighCPPBM) were found to be significant. These paths were added to the model based on findings in previous research as well as theoretical considerations. The next chapter, Chapter V, includes a discussion of conclusions based on the findings in this chapter and provides suggestions for future research.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes key findings and supports them with previous research. Contributions to the literature and suggestions to industry are also provided. Lastly, limitations of the study are discussed followed by suggestions for future research.

#### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study are discussed in relation to previous research. First, the results of pre-testing the consumer preference for prominent brand markings' scale are discussed. Second, the findings of the original, predicted paths in the model are discussed according to the order of how the hypotheses were tested. Third, findings of the paths added to the alternate model (i.e., unpredicted relationships) are discussed.

#### **Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings' Measurement**

One of the two primary goals of this study was to lessen confusion around the meaning of brand prominence by creating a definition. This was achieved by developing a measurement to explore the different levels of brand markings consumers preferred in the products they purchased. Prior to this dissertation study, no such measurement existed. This measurement was needed to properly examine consumers' degree of preference for prominent brand markings and factors associated to the concept.

The measurement was created to examine three levels preferences for prominent brand markings; high, low and no. The high and low preference items were created based on Han et al.'s (2010) experimental study where they discovered companies use brand marking strategies targeted towards consumers who want to display their status (i.e., high brand prominence) or not display their status (i.e., low brand prominence). Han et al. (2010) found some companies use a high prominent brand marking strategy where they place brand markings on the outside of their product. This strategy is targeted toward consumers with a high need to publicly display and signal their status (i.e., high preference for prominent brand markings). Another strategy companies use is the low prominent brand marking strategy where they place brand markings either on the inside of the product; or use specific color(s), materials and patterns on the outside of the product in lieu of a prominent brand marking such as an ostentatious logo. This strategy is targeted toward consumers with a low need to signal their status (i.e., low preference for prominent brand markings).

Findings from pretesting the measurement items and full survey instrument corroborate previous research (Han et al., 2010) that implied consumers have varying degrees of preferences for prominent brand markings. Specifically, results in this dissertation confirmed there are three levels of preferences for prominent brand markings. High preference is associated with brand markings being prominently displayed on the outside of a product. Low preference is associated with brand markings being subtle; either inside the product or recognizable through the use of colors, patterns and texture of

materials distinct to the brand. No preference is associated with not purchasing any products with brand markings on the inside or outside of the items.

### **Predicted Relationships**

#### **The relationship between normative CSII and status consumption.**

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between the normative influence dimension of consumer susceptibility of interpersonal influence (CSII) and status consumption. H1 was not supported (standardized estimate= -.18,  $p=.016$ ). This finding shows that consumers of African descent's status consumption behavior is not influenced by their close referents. This is an atypical finding because previous consumer studies have consistently found the relationship between normative CSII and status consumption to be positive (Clark et al., 2007; Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; Riquelme et al., 2011).

One possible reason for the conflicting results is not everyone close to us influences all areas of our life as normative CSII suggests. Normative CSII says people we are close to will have significant influence on our consumption behavior. In the case of status consumption, the results are showing not every single person we are close to influences every product and/or brand we consume. It is possible that we are influenced by specific close referents whom we actually see consuming the status good. For example, a daughter is close to her mother but her mom does not prefer status goods and therefore, has never bought them. In this scenario, the mother would not influence the daughter's purchase of status goods because the mother never modeled the behavior. Using the same scenario, the daughter has an aunt she is close to and the aunt does

purchase status goods. The daughter gets her preference for status goods from her aunt. These scenarios show how different close referents could have variations of normative influence based on the good being consumed.

### **The relationship between informational CSII and status consumption.**

Previous research found informational CSII to be an antecedent of status consumption (Clark et al., 2007; Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012; Riquelme et al., 2011). Based on these findings, hypothesis 2 predicted there would be a positive relationship between informational CSII and status consumption. H2 was supported (standardized estimate=.38,  $p=.000$ ). This finding shows distant referents have more influence on status consumption behavior. A possible reason for these conflicting results is consumers of African descent seek information about status goods by observing others they do not have a direct relationship with. In fact, Nielsen (2015b) stated it is highly probable consumers of African descent are influenced to purchase a product that is either made by or endorsed by a celebrity of African descent. Nielsen (2015b) stated in their report on affluent consumers of African descent that “a sense of presence and connection to (African-American) celebrities is extremely important among African-American consumers, and it has a real influence on their purchasing behaviors” (p. 40). The report also states that the influence of celebrities on purchase behavior is strongest among consumers of African descent making between \$50,000-\$75,000/year (Nielsen, 2015b).

**The moderating effect of ethnic identity on the relationships between normative CSII, informational CSII and status consumption.** Consumer research has found a connection between the dimensions of CSII and a person’s ethnic background.

D’Rozario and Yang (2012) found African Americans were different in their response to CSII in comparison to European- and Chinese-Americans. However, they did have the same reaction to CSII as Hispanics (D’Rozario & Yang, 2012). Meyers (2011) and Williams and Grantham (1999) found Blacks had various degrees of ethnic identification and responded more favorably to models who were Black as well. This supports the argument made earlier in this dissertation that perhaps Blacks are not a homogenous consumer group.

Hypothesis 1a predicted a consumer’s ethnic identity moderates the relationship between normative CSII and status consumption. H1a was supported in this study (standardized estimate=.65,  $p=.000$ ). Findings in this dissertation provide evidence that the relationship between normative CSII and status consumption is stronger in consumers of African descent with high ethnic identity. This finding supports Driedger’s (1976) statement that individuals who have positive feelings towards their ethnic group will want to associate with their ethnic group. This strong commitment to one’s ethnic group leads an individual to consume the same status goods as others in their ethnic group in order to conform to group values and norms (e.g., be rewarded or avoid punishment).

Hypothesis 2a predicted a consumer’s ethnic identity moderates the relationship between informational CSII and status consumption. H2a was supported in this study (standardized estimate= -.54,  $p=.000$ ). Results showed the relationship between informational CSII and status consumption was stronger in consumers with low ethnic identity. Driedger (1976) suggests the following as possible triggers of informational CSII: 1) feeling that ethnic group is inferior to a larger, dominant group; 2) feel restricted

by dominant group; 3) annoyed by ethnic group; or 4) feel it is necessary to hide their ethnic heritage. These may be possible reasons why the relationship between informational CSII and status consumption was strong in consumers of African descent with low ethnic identity.

The participants of African descent analyzed in this study overall, had relatively high ethnic identity (see Appendix F “Summaries of Answers for Each Measurement Variable”); meaning participants of African descent in this study were high in exploring their ethnic background as well as being highly committed to their ethnic group. In terms of hypotheses, the findings of H1a suggest consumers of African descent who are higher in ethnic identity depend more on close referents (i.e., normative influencers) when deciding to consume status goods. H2a findings suggest consumers of African descent who are lower in ethnic identity depend more on distant referents (i.e., informational influencers) to help them decide what status goods to purchase.

**The relationship between social comparison orientation and status consumption.** Hypothesis 3 predicted social comparison orientation would have a positive effect on status consumption. This hypothesis was supported (standardized estimate=.36,  $p=.000$ ). This relationship is possibly positive because “brands have the ability to communicate messages about a person to others” (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004, p. 28). Also, previous literature said that social comparison orientation and status consumption share similar characteristics (B. Buunk & Mussweiler, 2001; Kang & Park-Poaps, 2011). Dijkstra and B. Buunk’s (2002) study was one of the first to find social comparison orientation to be an antecedent of status consumption. Dreze and Nunes

(2009) also found the same relationship. The findings in this dissertation further support their research; people high in social comparison orientation do have a higher desire for status preempting them to consume goods high in status as well. Results supporting H3 also supports Bertrandias and Goldsmith's (2006) study where consumers of African descent were found to be sensitive to comparison information and use social cues to define their consumption behavior. This ethnic group has a higher tendency to care what other people think about them.

**The relationship between social comparison orientation and desire for unique consumer products.** Hypothesis 4 predicted social comparison orientation would have a negative effect on desire for unique consumer products. This hypothesis was not supported (standardized estimate=.14,  $p=.007$ ). The positive relationship found between the two concepts instead of the negative relationship that was predicted shows some consumers of African descent who are high in social comparison orientation also have a high desire for unique consumer products.

One possible reason why this relationship was not negative may be related to whom the comparison other is. A person could be high in social comparison and still desire unique products because they want to be different from the person(s)/group(s) who they are comparing themselves to (Mussweiler, 2003; Nichols & Schumann, 2012; Smeesters et al., 2010). They purchase unique products in an effort to distance themselves from those whom they are similar to. For example, a consumer of African descent may not want to be ostentatious like the other people in their social circle when buying a product. They may purchase a similar product as those in their social circle but

it will most likely be one that is not as well known to those in that circle. Buying the lesser known item provides the consumer the ability to signal their uniqueness within their social group.

**The relationship between status consumption and consumer preference for prominent brand markings.** Experimental studies conducted by Han et al. (2010) and Thwaites and Ferguson (2012) found a person's need for status influences their preference for prominent brand markings. Based on these findings, hypothesis 5 proposed status consumption would have a positive effect on consumer preference for prominent brand markings. Results supported this hypothesis (standardized estimate=.24,  $p=.000$ ). Consumers of African descent who consume status goods also prefer products with prominent brand markings. This finding supports previous research that people consume products that allow them to display their social status; whether actual or implied (Eastman et al., 1999; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008; Han et al., 2010; O'Cass & Frost, 2002; Thwaites & Ferguson, 2012).

Han et al.'s (2010) study discussed consumers desiring to publicly display their status would have a higher tendency to purchase a product with brand markings placed on the outside of the item. To confirm Han et al.'s (2010) findings, a regression analysis was conducted to see which level of brand prominence consumers of African descent high in status consumption would prefer. Results showed consumers of African descent had a high preference for prominent brand markings (standardized estimate=.50,  $p$ -value=.000) compared to low preference (standardized estimate=.32,  $p$ -value=.000) or no preference (standardized estimate=.27,  $p$ -value=.000) (see Appendix G). This indicated



consumers of African descent high in status consumption prefer loud brand markings that are visibly displayed on the outside of the product. The post-hoc results of the regression analysis supported Han et al.'s (2010) findings that consumers with a high need to signal their status would prefer brand markings that are publicly displayed and easily recognized by others.

**The relationship between desire for unique consumer products and consumer preference for prominent brand markings.** Hypothesis 6 posited desire for unique consumer products would have a negative effect on consumer preference for prominent brand markings. This hypothesis was not supported (standardized estimate=.65,  $p=.000$ ). The relationship was significantly positive instead of negative as hypothesized. To analyze the reason for this relationship, a regression analysis was conducted to see which level of brand prominence consumers of African descent with a high desire for unique products would prefer. Results showed consumers of African descent had a low preference for prominent brand markings (standardized estimate=.66,  $p\text{-value}=.000$ ), compared to high preference (standardized estimate=.15,  $p\text{-value}=.001$ ) or no preference (standardized estimate=.12,  $p\text{-value}=.016$ ) (see Appendix G). This indicates consumers of African descent with a high desire for unique products prefer discrete, quiet or subtle brand markings. The post-hoc results of the regression analysis supports Han et al.'s (2010) finding that there are consumers who do like brand markings but do not want them publicly displayed on the items they purchase.

## **Unpredicted Relationships**

### **The relationship between ethnic identity and status consumption.** A

specification search of the modification indices showed a negative and statistically significant relationship (standardized estimate=  $-.14$ ,  $p=.036$ ) between ethnic identity and status consumption. This relationship shows consumers of African descent who participated in this study are not directly influenced by their ethnic identity to consume status goods. In other words, people may not take into account their ethnic origin when consuming a status good. However, previous consumer research has linked ethnicity to people engaging in culture-specific consumer behavior. Xu et al. (2004) found ethnic identity to be a predictor of culture-specific consumption such as food and entertainment. Chattaraman and Lennon (2008) found ethnic identity predicts consumption of cultural apparel. These previous studies show that people do consider ethnicity when consuming goods.

It may be that in the case of status goods, the product has to have a cultural design in order for it to appeal to a person's ethnic origin. For example, Gucci created the Dionysus City bag (see Figure 4 in Chapter I) with different ethnic motifs to appeal to Middle Eastern, Japanese and Chinese consumers (Gucci, 2016; Rajvanshi, 2016). Thus, consumers of African descent who are high in ethnic identity might consume status goods more if manufacturers designed products using African-oriented motifs or symbols on them. It is also believed consumers of African descent may purchase status goods if they are endorsed or made by celebrities of the same ethnic origin. Nielsen's (2015b) report

on consumers of African descent found this ethnic group is 96% more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to purchase products endorsed by a celebrity.

**The relationship between desire for unique consumer products and status consumption.** A specification search of the modification indices showed a positive and statistically significant (standardized estimate=.19,  $p=.000$ ) relationship between desire for unique consumer products and status consumption. While this relationship was not hypothesized in this dissertation study, it did seem logical because Clark et al. (2007) found this same relationship. Therefore, the decision to add the relationship to the model was made.

Han et al. (2010) stated in their study that one of the ways wealthy consumers separate themselves from non-wealthy consumers is to purchase luxury goods with brand markings that the non-wealthy cannot recognize. Their finding supports the relationship between desire for unique consumer products and status consumption found in this dissertation. Consumers of African descent who want to display their uniqueness also engage in status consumption. When they do purchase a status good, it is most likely one that has discrete, subtle or quiet brand markings (i.e., low prominence) (Han et al., 2010).

**The relationship between normative CSII and high preference for prominent brand markings.** A specification search of the modification indices showed a positive and statistically significant relationship (standardized estimate=.25,  $p=.000$ ) between normative CSII and high preference for prominent brand markings. Ford and Ellis (1980) found products high in visibility (i.e., prominent brand markings) to be more susceptible to interpersonal influence. This means informal groups are probably more likely to

influence individuals to purchase products with symbols that are visible to their group members (i.e., high prominence). Lord et al. (2001) found consumers high in normative CSII to have frequent contact with and take purchase-relevant advice from close referents. Based on previous findings in the literature and definition of normative influence, it is reasoned a consumer of African descent may choose a product with high prominent brand markings in order to seek a reward or avoid punishment from the group(s) that have a strong influence over them.

### **Implications**

This dissertation developed a measurement, conceptualized a theoretical framework and tested hypothesized relationships that explain consumers' preference for prominent brand markings. These findings have several implications. This section discusses these implications from a theoretical and managerial perspective.

#### **Theoretical Implications**

This study has several theoretical implications. First, before this dissertation, there was no existing theoretical framework to explain how prominent (i.e., noticeable) consumers wanted a brand marking to be on products they purchased. This study created and established a conceptual framework that provides theoretical support for consumer preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM). Specifically, social comparison and reference group theories were found to be beneficial to understanding brand prominence. Informational CSII, social comparison orientation, status consumption and desire for unique consumer products were all found to be antecedents of consumers' preference for prominent brand markings. These findings add to the body of research on brand

prominence and provide theoretical support for the concept. They also provide academic and marketing researchers the ability to understand individual differences in brand markings.

The second theoretical implication of this dissertation is the creation of a CPPBM measurement. Previous research on brand prominence was primarily experimental and did not include measuring the level of preference for prominent brand markings. Findings from a pretest of measurement items created supported Han et al.'s (2010) suggestion that there are high and low preferences for prominent brand markings. An additional level of preference, no preference for prominent brand markings, was added to the measurement as well. By measuring the three levels of brand marking preferences, this study provides a detailed explanation on how status consumption and desire for unique consumer products influence CPPBM.

Third, this dissertation extends the exploration of brand markings beyond the luxury market. Previous experimental studies examined prominent brand markings only on luxury products. Branding has become the business norm even for companies who develop mass consumer products. The items created to measure CPPBM (i.e., the Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings' scale) referred to all products with brand markings. The items also focused on placement of the brand marking and did not mention brand names like previous research (Han et al., 2010; Thwaites & Ferguson, 2012). This allowed participants to think about whatever branded products they purchase whether they were luxury or not. Findings showed brand prominence is not exclusive to luxury products. If the consumer wants to show their status (i.e., status consumption),

then the consumer will have a higher desire for a brand marking on the outside of the item (i.e., high preference for prominent brand markings). If the consumer wants to show their uniqueness, then the consumer will have a higher desire for a brand marking that is not publicly visible (i.e., low preference for prominent brand markings).

The fourth theoretical implication of this study is it shows the impact ethnicity has beyond racial identification on consumption behavior. This study adds to a growing body of research showing consumers within the same ethnic group do not all self-identify their nationality, parents' nationality and ethnicity all the same (see Table 8). Consumers of African descent in this study were not monolithic in their self-identification. Participants self-identified as African, African American, Black or Caribbean. Furthermore, their identification of their parents shows some of the participants were really bi/multiracial (see Table 8) even though they self-identified with only one ethnicity. The findings also show consumers of African descent were not monolithic in the groups that influence their consumption behavior. Consumers within this ethnic group were influenced by close referents (i.e., normative CSII) (H1) as well as distant referents (i.e., informative CSII) (H2). Findings also showed consumers higher in status consumption preferred products with prominent brand markings (i.e., post-hoc analysis of H5) while consumers desiring unique products had a low preference for prominent for brand markings (i.e., post-hoc analysis of H6). These findings provide empirical evidence that consumers of African descent vary in their preference for prominent brand markings.

The fifth theoretical implication this study addresses is consumers of African descent's social comparison orientation leads them to consume status goods as well as

unique products. Previous social comparison research has tended to focus more on a person comparing themselves to others who are similar to them (Dijkstra & B. Buunk, 2002; Dreze & Nunes, 2009). This finding supports the growing body of literature showing people also compare themselves to dissimilar others (Mussweiler, 2003; Nichols & Schumann, 2012; Smeesters et al., 2010). This means there are times when a person chooses a product to express their similarity with comparative others as well as there are times when a person becomes uncomfortable with being so similar to others that they choose a different product to express their differentness (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). It is important to note that dissimilar others could be someone a person aspires to be like (i.e., aspirational other/upward comparison) or someone they want to dissociate from (i.e., dissociative other/downward comparison). The findings of this study expand the literature that has focused more on status consumption being a consequence of social comparison by empirically finding that consumption of unique products is also a consequence of social comparison.

The sixth theoretical implication of this dissertation is it provides insight into the social psychological and consumption behaviors of a population of consumers that researchers have not had a lot of access to or studied. Nielsen (2015b) stated consumers of African descent with an annual household income of \$75,000 or more are often overlooked in research and commerce. The majority of the consumers of African descent who participated in this study were more educated than the average person living in the U.S.; having earned a bachelor's degree (29.6%), master's degree (37.9%) or doctorate (21.2%). The U.S. Census Bureau's "2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year

Estimates” report on educational attainment showed that approximately 19.5% of consumers of African descent had attained a bachelor’s degree or higher between 2011 and 2015. Only 11.2% of the total population in the U.S. had attained a graduate or professional degree (United States Census Bureau, 2015c). The majority of participants in this study also had household incomes well above the national median of \$53,889/year. (United States Census Bureau, 2015c). Sixty-nine percent of the participants in this study had incomes greater than \$60,000/year with over 43% of them having incomes over \$100,000/year. The author of this dissertation extended the income to be able to collect data all the way to the top one percent of the household incomes (varies by state but the U.S. average starts at \$440,000/year) in the U.S (Cable News Network, 2017; Marte, 2015). This allowed for a more realistic view of the preferences in brand markings consumers in the top one percent of the socio-economic strata had.

### **Managerial Implications**

The findings of this study have several managerial implications. The first managerial implication of this study is the consumer preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM) scale can be used by business practitioners to test what level of prominence customers prefer in brand markings before creating them and placing them on products. Knowing what type of brand markings a business’ core customers prefer provides the company the ability to develop products with brand markings specifically for each of its consumer segments. Customers today have different many ways to interact with a company (e.g., social media, company website, store front, etc.) and provide feedback on what they desire in goods. Asking customers what type of brand



markings they prefer before creating products can lead to efficiencies of business resources, better return on investment (ROI), increased profitability and customer loyalty.

The second implication of this study is post-hoc findings (i.e., H5 and H6) of the relationships between status consumption, desire for unique consumer products and consumer preference for prominent brand markings (i.e., high and low preference) provide evidence that companies should consider having two, separate brand marking strategies when they create new products targeting consumers of African descent. Findings supported Han et al.'s (2010) suggestion that there are two kinds of brand prominence; high and low. Companies should place their brand markings on the outside of their products (i.e., high preference) to attract consumers of African descent who are high in status consumption. To attract consumers with a high desire for unique products, companies should place their brand markings on the inside of the product or use materials, create a color scheme or pattern mix (i.e., low preference) that is not likely to be recognized by the mass consumer market.

The third managerial implication of this study supports a growing body of research advocating for companies to create different brand marking strategies to attract consumers within the same ethnic group. Findings in this study show consumers of African descent behave differently when ethnicity was added. For some consumers in this ethnic group, their status consumption was triggered by close referents (i.e., normative CSII) of the same ethnicity (H1a). For other consumers of African descent, their status consumption was influenced by a distant referent (i.e., informational CSII) (H2). These results show different marketing strategies may be needed when targeting

consumers within this ethnic group. For example, a marketing campaign like the one Patek Philippe created targeting their luxury watches (i.e., status good) as family heirlooms that can be passed down from a father to a son may be more appealing to those consumers more susceptible to normative influence. A campaign with actors and models of African descent consuming the status good may appeal more to those consumers of African descent who are more susceptible to informational influence. As stated in the “Discussion of Findings” section, Nielsen (2015b) found this ethnic group is 96% more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to purchase products endorsed by a celebrity.

A fourth managerial implication of this study is companies need to explore creating products with ethnic motifs to attract more customers. The finding that ethnic identity did not have an effect on status consumption may be due to brand markings on products not having any African-related motifs on them. Nielsen (2015b) state consumers of African descent with annual household incomes of \$75,000 or more are “brand-loyal consumers and will spend more on products that appeal to their passions” (p. 38). Consumers of African descent “earning \$100,000+ say they are willing to pay extra for a product that is consistent with an image they want to convey” (p. 35). Therefore, companies may consider developing status products targeting consumers of African descent using African-related motifs and symbols like Gucci did with their Dionysus City bag collection.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study had several limitations. The first limitation is detailed dimensional effects were not tested in three of the constructs that had more than one dimension (i.e.,

social comparison orientation, consumer preference for prominent brand markings and ethnic identity). In those three constructs, each dimension may play a different role in anticipating hypothesized relationships; thus, this study fails to provide how each dimension of the concepts described above lead us to an understanding of consumers' preference for prominent brand markings. Future research should be conducted where a hypothesis is created for each dimension of each construct in this study's theoretical framework to examine their individual impact on consumers' preference for prominent brand markings. In fact, the post-hoc analyses conducted on H5 (consumers high in status consumption had a high preference for prominent brand markings) and H6 (consumers high in desire for unique products had a low preference for prominent brand markings) strongly support this suggestion.

The second limitation of the study is that ethnic identity was only examined as a moderator on normative CSII and informational CSII. The direct effect of ethnic identity on social comparison orientation, desire for unique consumer products and consumer preference for prominent brand markings should be examined in future studies. Testing ethnic identity as a moderator between the other relationships in the theoretical framework should also be studied in the future. Doing so will add to the sparse body of consumer research of how a person's ethnicity impacts their purchase behavior; if at all.

A third limitation of this study is that the study did not examine if a person's stage of ethnic identity development had any influence on their consumption behavior. The majority of this study's participants were in their 40s or older, so they are probably in the third or fourth stage of ethnic identity achievement. However, we do not know what

stage of ethnic identity achievement they are in since it was not examined. Moratorium, the third stage, is where people are exploring and searching (i.e., one dimension of ethnic identity concept) to understand one's ethnicity (Phinney, 1990). The fourth stage, ethnic identity achievement, is where people become fully committed (i.e., second dimension of ethnic identity concept) to their ethnicity based on their exploration and understanding of their ethnicity (Phinney, 1990). Future research should look at what stage of ethnic identity development consumers of African descent are and how it affects their preferences for prominent brand markings.

A fourth limitation of this study is that a convenience sample was used. The sample population was not representative of the four largest ethnic groups described in the methodology section. Participants of Asian, Caucasian and Hispanic/Latino descent did participate in the study. However, participation from these groups was not large enough to make quality comparisons between groups. Also, the majority of the study's participants lived in the southern region of the U.S. It is believed U.S. consumers are not a homogenous group in terms of consumption behavior. Future research needs to include a sample representative of the four largest ethnic groups in the U.S. from all locations (north, south, east and west) because these findings cannot be generalized to the entire U.S. population since only one ethnic group (i.e., consumers of African descent) from primarily one part of the country was analyzed.

The fifth limitation of this study is it did not include hypotheses to examine the demographic differences between consumers of African descent. As previous researchers have suggested, ethnic groups are not homogeneous in their consumption behavior

(D’Rozario & Yang, 2012; Meyers, 2011; Williams & Grantham, 1999). Since this study collected data from consumers of African descent who were highly educated with household incomes above the nation’s average, knowing how they react to the factors that influence their preferences for brand markings would be valuable information to have access to. Nielsen’s (2015b) report on affluent and educated consumers of African descent provides support for the need to better understand this consumer segment due to its enormous buying power. Future research would provide in-depth information that can be used to develop products and marketing campaigns for niche markets within this ethnic group.

In conclusion, this dissertation provides a theoretical framework that empirically answers four questions. The first question this study answered was what influences consumers to choose products certain brand markings? Results showed the following factors directly and indirectly influence consumers’ preference for brand markings: normative CSII, informational CSII, social comparison orientation, status consumption and desire for unique consumer products. The second question this study answered was what influence do social groups have on a person’s consumption of goods that help them display their status and uniqueness? Results showed while close referents (i.e., normative CSII) had a negative effect on a person’s consumption of status goods, distant referents (i.e., informational CSII) had a positive effect on status consumption. A person’s social comparison behavior influences their consumption of status goods and unique goods. The third question this dissertation answered was how does consumption of status goods and desire for unique goods influence consumers’ preference for brand markings?

Results show status consumption, desire for unique consumer products and normative CSII influence a consumer's preference for prominent brand markings. Specifically, post-hoc analyses showed status consumption leads to a high preference for prominent brand markings (i.e., H5), desire for unique consumer products leads to a low preference for prominent brand markings (i.e., H6) and normative CSII leads to a high preference for prominent brand markings. The last question this dissertation answered was how much does a person identifying with their ethnic origin influences their decision to consume and display status goods? Results showed ethnic identity did influence consumption behavior. In consumers of African descent, the concept was found to moderate the relationships between normative CSII, informational CSII and status consumption. It also had a direct, negative impact on status consumption among consumers of African descent. This dissertation sheds light on the social-psychological and consumer behavior factors that influence individual's preferences for brand markings as well as it points to future research needs with regards to consumers of African descent.

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APPENDIX A

PRE-TEST OF MAIN SURVEY



Dear Participant:

Hello, my name is Natalie Baucum and I am a doctoral student conducting this study under the guidance of Dr. Byoungcho Jin at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). This survey is part of my doctoral research to understand factors related to consumers' preference for brand markings (ex. logo, design pattern, material used, etc.). Your participation is essential and valuable in order for me to complete my dissertation research and graduate from my doctoral program at UNCG.

You are invited to voluntarily participate in this study. It should take approximately 10 minutes to complete this survey. There is no right or wrong answer to the questions. Your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous. You are allowed to work at your own pace. You may stop taking this survey at any time you feel uncomfortable. There is no risk and no benefit to you by participating in this study. By filling out this survey, you are agreeing to participate in this study.

Thank you in advance for your participation. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask Dr. Jin and/or the researcher. She will be glad to assist you. In addition, if you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of North Carolina Human Subject Committee at 1-336-256-1482.

Sincerely,



NATALIE BAUCUM MBA, MSc

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**Section A:** Please circle the number that best explains how much you agree with each statement below.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Slightly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
I do not purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends will approve of them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is important that others like the products and brands I buy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When buying products, I purchase brands I think others will approve of.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If other people can see me using a product, I purchase the brand they expect me to buy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I want to be like someone, I try to buy the same brands they buy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I observe what others are buying or using.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I have little experience with a brand, I ask my friends about the brand.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I consult other people to help choose the best brand available.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I gather information from friends or family about a brand before I buy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Section B:** Please circle the number that best explains how much you agree with each statement below.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Slightly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
I compare how my loved ones (ex. boy or girlfriend, family members, etc.) are doing with how others are doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I pay a lot of attention to how I do things compared with how others do things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with how others have done.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I compare how I am doing socially (ex. social skills, popularity) with other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am not the type of person who compares myself with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I compare myself with others with respect to what I have accomplished in life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I like to talk with others about mutual opinions and experiences.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I try to find out what others in a similar situation would do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I like to know what others in a similar situation would do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I want to learn more about something, I try to find out what others think about it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I consider my situation in life relative to that of other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Section C:** Please circle the number that best explains how much you agree with each statement below.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I buy a product just because it has status.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am interested in new products with status.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I pay more for a product if it has status.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The status of a product is irrelevant to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I think products with some snob appeal are valuable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Section D:** Please circle the number that best explains how much you agree with each statement below.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am attracted to rare objects.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I tend to be a fashion leader rather than a fashion follower.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I tend to buy a product if it is scarce.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer to have things custom-made than to have them ready-made.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I enjoy having things that others do not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I do not pass up the opportunity to order custom features on the products I buy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I try new products and services before others do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I shop at stores that carry merchandise which is different and unusual.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Section E:** Please circle the number you agree with the most in the situations described below.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I tend to buy products with a trademark on the outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer products with a trademark on the outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer the trademark to be on the outside of the products I buy rather than inside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I tend to buy products with unique design features on the outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer products with unique design features on the outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I do not buy products with a trademark or unique design features on the outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I do not wear or carry apparel and accessories with trademarks or unique design features.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I do not purchase products from companies that use trademarks or unique design features.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Section F:** Please circle the number that best explains what you *actually do/feel* in the situations stated below.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I spend time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I do things that will help me understand my ethnic background better.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I talk to other people in order to learn more about my ethnic group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. I consider my nationality (country of origin) to be \_\_\_\_\_.
2. My ethnicity (cultural group/ancestry) is \_\_\_\_\_. Please write in below. If you are biracial, please indicate this as well.
3. My father's ethnicity is (write in)\_\_\_\_\_.
4. My mother's ethnicity is (write in)\_\_\_\_\_.

#### **Section G: Demographic Information**

1. Please indicate your age below.
2. Sex (mark answer with an X) Female\_\_\_\_ Male\_\_\_\_ Transgender\_\_\_\_
3. Please indicate the number of years you have lived in the United States below.
4. Please indicate what state within the U.S. you currently reside below.
5. Are you currently a student?
  - a. High school student and 18 years of age
  - b. College student and 18 years of age
  - c. College Student over 18 years
  - d. Not a student

6. Education (please put an X next to the highest degree completed)

\_\_\_\_\_High School      \_\_\_\_\_Some College      \_\_\_\_\_Community College  
\_\_\_\_\_Bachelor's Degree      \_\_\_\_\_Master's Degree      \_\_\_\_\_Doctorate  
\_\_\_\_\_Trade School

7. Annual Household Income: \_\_\$0- 20,000 \_\_\$20,001 - 40,000

\_\_\$40,001 - 60,000 \_\_\$60,001 - 80,000 \_\_\$ 80,001-100,000

\_\_\$100,001-120,000 \_\_\$121,000-140,000 \_\_\$140,001-160,000

\_\_\$160,001-\$180,000 \_\_\$180,001-\$200,000 \_\_\$201,000-220,000

\_\_\$220,001-240,000 \_\_\$240,001-260,000 \_\_\$260,001-280,000

\_\_\$280,001-300,000 \_\_\$300,001-320,000 \_\_\$320,001-340,000

\_\_\$340,001-360,000 \_\_\$360,001-380,000 \_\_\$380,001-400,000

\_\_\$400,001-420,000 \_\_\$420,001-440,000 \_\_>\$440,001

8. Please indicate your current profession or career below.

9. Please indicate your current job title below.

**End of Survey \* Thank You Very Much!**

## APPENDIX B

### PRE-TEST OF CONSUMER PREFERENCE FOR PROMINENT BRAND MARKINGS SURVEY



Dear Participant:

Hello, my name is Natalie Baucum and I am a doctoral student conducting this study under the guidance of Dr. Byoungcho Jin at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). This survey is part of my doctoral research to understand factors related to consumers' preference for brand markings (ex. logo, design pattern, material used, etc.). Your participation is essential and valuable in order for me to complete my dissertation research and graduate from my doctoral program at UNCG.

You are invited to voluntarily participate in this study. The survey is available online and can be accessed using this link: (insert link). It should take approximately 3 minutes to complete this survey. There is no right or wrong answer to the questions. Your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous. You are allowed to work at your own pace. You may stop taking this survey at any time you feel uncomfortable. There is no risk and no benefit to you by participating in this study. By filling out this survey, you are agreeing to participate in this study.

Thank you in advance for your participation. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask the researcher. I will be glad to assist you. In addition, if you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of North Carolina Human Subject Committee at 1-336-256-1482.

Sincerely,



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**Please circle the number that best explains how much you agree with each statement below.**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Slightly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
I tend to buy products with a trademark on the outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I tend to buy products with unique design features on the outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have a tendency to purchase products that do not have a trademark or unique design features on the outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer products with a trademark on the outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer products with unique design features on the outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I do not buy products with a trademark or unique design features on the outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer the trademark to be on the outside of the products I buy rather than inside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer products with unique design features more than a large, noticeable trademark.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I do not wear or carry apparel and accessories with trademarks or unique design features.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am attracted to apparel and accessories where the brand name and/or design features (ex. Nike swoosh, Nike name) are easily recognized by others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am attracted to apparel and accessories with brand names and/or design features most people will not recognize.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I think it is a waste of money to purchase products with visible trademarks and unique design features.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I tend to choose products with large, visible trademarks (ex. logos, name of brand) others will easily recognize.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7



I am more attracted to understated (not flashy or loud) products.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I do not purchase products from companies that use trademarks or unique design features.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## APPENDIX C

### PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK AND ADAPTATIONS MADE FROM PRE-TESTING MAIN SURVEY

#### **Participant Feedback**

1. Section B, question 1 was difficult to understand.
2. Too long.
3. May want to add examples to better focus individuals.
4. Some questions seem repetitive/closely related.
5. Page with outer branding and features got confusing. Wasn't sure how to answer when the options were combined.
6. Add forced response. Question with "loved ones" "boyfriend or girlfriend" replace with partner or significant other.

#### **Adaptations Made to the Full Survey**

1. NCSII4
  - Original statement: If other people can see me using a product, I purchase the brand they expect me to buy.
  - Revised statement: If people I frequently interact with will see me using a certain product, I purchase the brand they expect me to buy.
2. ICSII2
  - Original statement: If I have little experience with a brand, I ask my friends about the brand.

- Revised statement: If I have little experience with a brand, I ask someone I trust (ex. family, friends, store clerk) about the brand.

### 3. ICSII4

- Original statement: I consult other people to help choose the best brand available.
- Revised statement: I consult other people (ex. store clerk, social media sites, authors of product reviews in magazines) to help me choose the best brand available.

### 4. SCOA1

- Original statement: I compare how my loved ones (boy or girlfriend, family members, etc.) are doing with how others are doing.
- Revised statement: I compare how my loved ones (ex. friends, family, partner/significant other, etc.) are doing with how others who are not as close to me are doing.

### 5. SCOA3

- Original statement: If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with how others have done.
- Revised statement: If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with how well others have done.

### 6. SCOO1

- Original statement: I like to talk to with others about mutual opinions and experiences.

- Revised statement: I like to talk with others who share similar opinions and experiences to mine.

#### 7. SC1

- Original statement: I buy a product just because it has status.
- Revised statement: I buy a product just because it has status (shows a person's social standing).

#### 8. SC5

- Original statement: I think products with some snob appeal are valuable.
- Revised statement: I think products with some snob appeal (ex. displays superior taste) are valuable.

#### 9. DUCP4

- Original statement: I prefer to have things custom-made than to have them ready-made.
- Revised statement: I prefer to have products I can customize over products that cannot be customized (ex. ready-made).

#### 10. HighPPBM1

- Original statement: I tend to buy products with a trademark on the outside.
- Revised statement: I tend to buy products with a trademark (ex., logo, brand name, symbol) on the outside.

#### 11. LowPPBM1

- Original statement: I tend to buy products with unique design features on the outside.

- Revised statement: I tend to buy products with unique design features (ex. colors, patterns, or fabrics specific to the brand).

#### 12. EExperience1

- Original statement: I spend time trying to find out more about my ethnic group such as its history, traditions and customs.
- Revised statement: I spend time trying to find out more about my ethnic group (ex. a group of people who share common characteristics such as language, culture, beliefs, customs, etc.) such as its history, traditions and customs.

#### 13. Nationality

- Original statement: I consider my nationality (country of origin) to be \_\_\_\_\_.
- Revised statement: Please provide the nationality (ex. American, European, Canadian, Asian, Caribbean, South American, etc.) you most identify with in the space below.

#### 14. Ethnicity

Original statement: My ethnicity (cultural group/ancestry) is \_\_\_\_\_.

Please write in below. If you are biracial, please indicate this as well.

- Revised statement: Please provide the ethnicity (ex., African American, White, Caucasian, French, Native American, etc.) you most identify with in the space below. If you are biracial, please indicate this as well.

#### 15. Age

- Original statement: Age\_\_\_\_\_
- Revised statement: Please indicate your age below.

16. Deleted statement: How long have you lived in the United States?

17. Residence

- Original statement: Please indicate what state within the U.S. you currently reside below.
- Revised statement: Please indicate what country or state you currently reside in the space below.

18. Deleted statement: Please indicate your current job title below.

APPENDIX D  
RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS

**Email Script**



Dear Participant:

Hello, my name is Natalie Baucum and I am a doctoral student conducting this study under the guidance of Dr. Byoungcho Jin at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). This survey is part of my doctoral research to understand factors related to consumers' preference for brand markings (ex. logo, design pattern, material used, etc.). Your participation is essential and valuable for it will help me complete my dissertation research and graduate from my doctoral program at UNCG.

If you are at least 18 years of age (the required age to participate in the study) and older, I invite you to click on the link below and participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary and provides no risk or benefit. Your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous by me when received. However, since you are completing the survey online, absolute confidentiality of the data you are providing through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. To reduce the chances of exposing any information you provide in the survey, please be sure to close your web browser when you have completed the survey. That's all you have to do to disconnect from the survey link since no login or password is needed.

The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete but feel free to work at your own pace since the survey is not timed. There is no right or wrong answer to the questions. Also, you may stop taking this survey at any time you feel uncomfortable.

Thank you in advance for your participation. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me. I will be glad to assist you. In addition, if you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of North Carolina Human Subject Committee at 1-855-251-2351.

Sincerely,



NATALIE BAUCUM MBA, MSc

Doctoral Student

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University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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### **Social Media Post Script**



Good Day Everyone!

As many of you are aware, I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am conducting a study as part of my doctoral research to understand factors related to consumers' preference for brand markings. Your participation is essential and valuable for it will help me complete my dissertation research and graduate from my doctoral program at UNCG. If you are at least 18 years old (minimum required age to participate), I'd like it if you would click on the link in this post and take my survey.

Since you are completing the survey online, absolute confidentiality of the data you are providing through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. To reduce the chances of exposing any information you provide in the survey, please be sure to close your web browser when you have completed the survey. That's all you have to do to disconnect from the survey link since no login or password is needed.

It should take 10 minutes or less to complete the survey. However, please work at your own pace. The survey is not timed. Also, your participation is voluntary and provides no risk or benefit. Your answers are confidential and anonymous as you will not provide your name, phone number or address. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you are free to stop taking the survey.

Thank you in advance for participating in my dissertation research and helping me finish this journey to Professor Baucum. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a



research subject, you may contact the University of North Carolina Human Subject Committee at 1-855-251-2351.

Have a nice day everyone!  
Natalie

### **In-person Script**



**Me:** Hello, my name is Natalie Baucum and I am a doctoral student conducting a study as part of my doctoral research to understand factors related to consumers' preference for brand markings. Your participation is essential and valuable for it will help me complete my dissertation research and graduate from my doctoral program at UNCG. If you are at least 18 years old, I'd like it if you would take my survey.

Are you at least 18 years old?

**If Potential Participant is 18:** Great! If you have 10 minutes, I can help you access the link on either my mobile phone or yours. Your participation is voluntary and provides no risk or benefit. Your answers are confidential and anonymous as you will not provide your name, phone number or address.

Since you are completing the survey online, absolute confidentiality of the data you are providing through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. To reduce the chances of exposing any information you provide in the survey, please be sure to close your web browser when you have completed the survey. That's all you have to do to disconnect from the survey link since no login or password is needed.

Feel free to work at your own pace. I'll be here to answer any questions you have. Also, if you feel uncomfortable at any time, you are free to stop taking the survey.

Shall we get started?

**If Potential Participant is NOT 18:** Unfortunately, the minimum age to participate is 18. Thank you for your time. Have a nice day.

**Once Participant Finishes Survey:** Thank you so much for participating in my dissertation research. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research

subject, you may contact the University of North Carolina Human Subject Committee at 1-855-251-2351.

Have a nice day!

### **Follow-Up Recruitment Script**



Hello!

You received an email from me recently asking you to participate in my doctoral research. If you have taken the survey, thank you for doing so. If not, you still have time to do so. As I said in my initial message, your participation is essential and valuable because it helps me complete my dissertation research and graduate from my doctoral program at UNCG.

The minimum age to participate again is 18. If you meet the age requirement, I'd like it if you would click on the link in this message and take the survey. Since you are completing the survey online, absolute confidentiality of the data you are providing through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. To reduce the chances of exposing any information you provide in the survey, please be sure to close your web browser when you have completed the survey. That's all you have to do to disconnect from the survey link since no login or password is needed.

It should take 10 minutes or less to complete the survey. However, please work at your own pace. The survey is not timed. Also, your participation is voluntary and provides no risk or benefit. Your answers are confidential and anonymous as you will not provide your name, phone number or address. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you are free to stop taking the survey.

Thank you in advance for participating in my dissertation research and helping me finish this journey to Professor Baucum. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of North Carolina Human Subject Committee at 1-855-251-2351.

Have a nice day!  
Natalie

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "N. Baucum". The "N" is large and stylized, with the first name "Natalie" and last name "Baucum" written in a fluid, connected hand.

NATALIE BAUCUM MBA, MSc

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## APPENDIX E

### RESULTS OF CFAS ON INDIVIDUAL CONSTRUCTS IN MEASUREMENT MODEL

#### **Normative Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence**

The initial CFA conducted on the 8-item, normative consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence factor of the consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence construct found a few issues when a specification search (i.e., review of path estimates, standardized residuals and modification indices) was conducted. A specification search found item NCSII1 to have several standardized residuals greater than 2.5. The factor loading for NCSII1 was also low. Based on this specification search, it was decided to delete NCSII1 and re-run the CFA. Model fit was not significant so a second specification search was conducted. Issues with high covariances between NCSII2↔NCSII3, NCSII6↔8 and NCSII7↔NCSII8 were found in the modification indices. Items NCSII2 and NCSII3, while worded differently, involved the approval of others making them similar in meaning. So these two items were covaried to reduce the error variance and correlation between them. After these items were covaried, high covariances between NCSII6↔NCSII8 and NCSII7↔NCSII8 remained. Review of these items' wording showed they both involved participants "purchasing the same products and/or brand as others" (see Table E1). The similarity in meaning is what probably caused high covariances between these sets of items. NCSII7↔NCSII8 was covaried first. RMSEA was still above .70 and the high covariance remained between

NCSII6↔NCSII8, so these two items were covaried. Model fit was achieved ( $\chi^2=29.38$ ,  $df=11$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.002$ ,  $TLI=.98$ ,  $CFI=.99$ ,  $RMSEA=.053$ ).

The construct was considered to be valid because all factor loadings were greater than .40 (see Table E1) and AVE was greater than .50 (.59). The construct was considered reliable because Cronbach's alpha was greater than .70 (.88) and CR was greater than .70 (.79). The measurement model tested normative CSII with seven items.

*Table E1*

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Normative Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (N=594)*

Variables	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	t-value
<b><u>Normative CSII</u></b>			
(Cronbach's $\alpha=.88$ , $CR=.78$ , $AVE=.59$ )			
1. NCSII2: It is important that others like the products and brands I buy.	.71	-	-
2. NCSII3: When buying products, I purchase brands I think others will approve of.	.74	.05	21.58
3. NCSII4: If people I frequently interact with will see me using a certain product, I purchase the brand they expect me to buy.	.76	.06	16.34
4. NCSII5: I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.	.72	.09	15.58
5. NCSII6: I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.	.77	.07	16.42
6. NCSII7: If I want to be like someone, I try to buy the same brands they buy.	.58	.07	12.74
7. NCSII8: I identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they do.	.66	.07	14.22

Model fit ( $\chi^2=29.38$ ,  $df=11$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.002$ ,  $TLI=.98$ ,  $CFI=.99$ ,  $RMSEA=.053$ ). Note: One item ("I do not purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends will approve of them.") was deleted.

### Informational Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence

The initial CFA conducted on the four-item, informational consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (ICSII) construct found no issues with any of the items when a specification search (i.e., review of path estimates, standardized residuals and modification indices) was conducted. Model fit was good ( $\chi^2=.284$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p$ -value=.868, TLI=1.01, CFI=1.00, RMSEA=.000). The construct was considered to be valid because all factor loadings were greater than .40 (see Table E2) and AVE was close to .50 (.45). The construct was considered to be reliable because Cronbach's alpha was greater than .70 (.75) and CR was close to .70 (.65). Hair et al. (2010) recommended reliability to be between .60 and .70, so the CR was acceptable. The measurement model was tested with all four informational CSII items.

Table E2

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Informational Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (N=594)*

Variables	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	t-value
<b><u>Informational CSII</u></b> (Cronbach's $\alpha=.75$ , CR=.65, AVE=.45)			
1. ICSII1: To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I observe what others are buying or using.	.49	-	-
2. ICSII2: If I have little experience with a brand, I ask someone I trust (ex. family, friends, store clerk) about the brand.	.71	.12	10.31
3. ICSII3: I gather information from friends or family about a brand before I buy.	.80	.14	10.55

4. ICSII4: I consult other people (ex. store clerk, social media sites, authors of product reviews in magazines) to help me choose the best brand available.	.65	.13	9.97
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Model fit ( $\chi^2=.284$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.868$ ,  $TLI=1.01$ ,  $CFI=1.00$ ,  $RMSEA=.000$ ).

### **Social Comparison Orientation**

The CFA conducted on the two-factor, social comparison orientation (SCO) construct found an issue with one item (SCOO5) when a specification search was conducted. Several standardized residual covariances were found on item SCOO5 (“I consider my situation in life relative to that of other people.”). Modification indices also suggested a significant amount of modifications of SCOO5 across multiple items. The item’s factor loading was also low. Based on the issues found in the specification search, item SCOO5 was deleted. Model fit ( $\chi^2=82.44$ ,  $df=34$ ,  $p<.000$ ,  $TLI=.97$ ,  $CFI=.98$ ,  $RMSEA=.049$ ) was achieved when this item was deleted.

Next, the SCO measurement was assessed for validity. Two of the 10 remaining items had factor loadings less than .50 (see Table E3). The AVE was less than .50 (.43). Validity was adequate. Cronbach’s alpha and CR were greater than .70 (see Table E3) suggesting the construct is reliable. The measurement model was tested with 10 SCO items (i.e., six abilities items and four opinions items).

Table E3

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Social Comparison Orientation (N=594)

Variables (Cronbach's $\alpha$ =.82, CR=.79, AVE=.43)	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	t- value
<b><u>Abilities</u></b>			
1. SCOA1: I compare how my loved ones (friends, family, partner/significant other, etc.) are doing with how others who are not as close to me are doing.	.60	-	-
2. SCOA2: I pay a lot of attention to how I do things compared with how others do things.	.62	.10	11.77
3. SCOA3: If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with how well others have done.	.73	.10	13.22
4. SCOA4: I compare how I am doing socially (ex. social skills, popularity) with other people.	.75	.10	13.37
5. SCOA5R: I am not the type of person who compares myself with others. <sup>a</sup>	.46	.09	9.43
6. SCOA6: I compare myself with others with respect to what I have accomplished in life.	.71	.10	13.01
<b><u>Opinions</u></b>			
1. SCOO1: I like to talk with others who share similar opinions and experiences to mine.	.47	-	-
2. SCOO2: I try to find out what others in a similar situation would do.	.85	.17	11.45
3. SCOO3: I like to know what others in a similar situation would do.	.89	.18	11.47
4. SCOO4: If I want to learn more about something, I try to find out what others think about it.	.54	.15	9.38

Model fit ( $\chi^2=82.44$ ,  $df=34$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.000$ ,  $TLI=.97$ ,  $CFI=.98$ ,  $RMSEA=.049$ ). Note: One item ("I consider my situation in life relative to that of other people.") was deleted.

<sup>a</sup>Reverse coded item.



## Status Consumption

The CFA conducted on the one-factor status consumption construct found no issues with any of the measured variables. Therefore, all five original items were maintained in the CFA of the measurement model. Model fit ( $\chi^2=22.64$ ,  $df=5$ ,  $p$ -value=.000, TLI=.97, CFI=.99, RMSEA=.077) was adequate. When the construct was examined for validity, all factor loadings were greater than .50 (see Table E4) but the AVE was slightly less than .50 (.45). Validity was adequate. The construct was considered to be reliable because Cronbach's alpha and CR were greater than .70 (see Table E4).

*Table E4*

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Status Consumption (N=594)*

<b>Variables</b> (Cronbach's $\alpha$ =.84, CR=.74, AVE=.45)	<b>Standardized Estimate</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>t- value</b>
1. SC1: I buy a product just because it has status.	.80	-	-
2. SC2: I am interested in new products with status.	.82	.06	20.35
3. SC3: I pay more for a product if it has status.	.79	.07	19.78
4. SC4R: The status of a product is irrelevant to me. <sup>a</sup>	.56	.07	13.34
5. SC5: I think products with some snob appeal are valuable.	.63	.06	15.32
Model fit ( $\chi^2=22.64$ , $df=5$ , $p$ -value=.000, TLI=.97, CFI=.99, RMSEA=.077). <sup>a</sup> Reverse coded item.			

## Desire for Unique Consumer Products

The CFA conducted on the one-factor desire for unique consumer products' (DUCP) construct found no issues with any of the measurement items. Therefore, all eight original items were maintained in the CFA of the measurement model. Model fit ( $\chi^2=114.12$ ,  $df=20$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.000$ ,  $TLI=.91$ ,  $CFI=.94$ ,  $RMSEA=.089$ ) was moderate. When the construct was examined for validity, all factor loadings were greater than .50 but the AVE was slightly less than .50 (.41) (see Table E5). Validity was adequate. Cronbach's alpha and CR were greater than .70 (see Table E5) suggesting the construct is reliable.

*Table E5*

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Desire for Unique Consumer Products (N=594)*

Variables (Cronbach's $\alpha=.85$ , CR=.86, AVE=.41)	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	t- value
1. DUCP1: I am attracted to rare objects.	.60	-	-
2. DUCP2: I tend to be a fashion leader rather than a fashion follower.	.63	.10	12.06
3. DUCP3: I tend to buy a product if it is scarce.	.70	.10	13.10
4. DUCP4: I prefer to have things custom-made than to have them ready-made.	.57	.09	11.23
5. DUCP5: I enjoy having things that others do not.	.69	.10	12.95
6. DUCP6: I do not pass up the opportunity to order custom features on the products I buy.	.64	.09	12.26
7. DUCP7: I try new products and services before others do.	.60	.09	11.68
8. DUCP8: I shop at stores that carry merchandise which is different and unusual.	.69	.09	12.88
Model fit ( $\chi^2=114.12$ , $df=20$ , $p\text{-value}=.000$ , $TLI=.91$ , $CFI=.94$ , $RMSEA=.089$ ).			

### **Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings**

The CFA conducted on the three-factor consumer preference for prominent brand markings (CPPBM) construct found no major issues with any of the measured variables. Therefore, all eight original items (i.e., three high, two low and three no preference items) from the scale development were maintained in the CFA of the measurement model. Model fit ( $\chi^2=64.45$ ,  $df=17$ ,  $p<.000$ , TLI=.97, CFI=.98, RMSEA=.069) was good. The construct was found to be valid because all of the factor loadings and AVE were greater than .50 (see Table E6). Cronbach's alpha and CR were greater than .70 suggesting the construct is reliable (see Table E6).

Table E6

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings*

(N=594)

Variables (Cronbach's $\alpha$ =.80, CR=.92, AVE=.67)	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	t- value
<b><u>High CPPBM</u></b>			
1. HPPBM1: I tend to buy products with a trademark on the outside.	.82	-	-
2. HPPBM2: I prefer products with a trademark on the outside.	.97	.04	26.01
3. HPPBM3: I prefer the trademark to be on the outside of the products I buy rather than inside.	.78	.04	21.89
<b><u>Low CPPBM</u></b>			
1. LPPBM1: I tend to buy products with unique design features on the outside.	.77	-	-
2. LPPBM2: I prefer products with unique design features on the outside.	.89	.15	7.30
<b><u>No CPPBM</u></b>			
1. NPPBM1R: I do not buy products with a trademark or unique design features on the outside. <sup>a</sup>	.67	-	-
2. NPPBM2R: I do not wear or carry apparel and accessories with trademarks or unique design features. <sup>a</sup>	.91	.08	15.16
3. NPPBM3R: I do not purchase products from companies that use trademarks or unique design features. <sup>a</sup>	.71	.06	14.87
Model fit ( $\chi^2$ =64.45, $df$ =17, p-value=.000, TLI=.97, CFI=.98, RMSEA=.069). <sup>a</sup> Reverse coded item.			

**Ethnic Identity**

The CFA conducted on the two-factor, ethnic identity (EI) construct found no major issues with any of the measured variables. Therefore, all six original items (i.e., three exploration items and three commitment items) were maintained in the CFA of the measurement model. Model fit ( $\chi^2$ =28.62,  $df$ =8,  $p$ <.000, TLI=.98, CFI=.99,

RMSEA=.066) was good. The construct was considered to be valid because all of the factor loadings and AVE were greater than .50 (see Table E7). Cronbach's alpha and CR were greater than .70 (see Table E7) suggesting the construct is reliable.

*Table E7*

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Ethnic Identity (N=594)*

<b>Variables</b> (Cronbach's $\alpha$ =.89, CR=.90, AVE=.69)	<b>Standardized Estimate</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>t-value</b>
<b><u>Ethnic Identity-Exploration</u></b>			
1. EIE1: I spend time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions and customs.	.77	-	-
2. EIE2: I do things that will help me understand my ethnic background better.	.89	.05	20.97
3. EIE3: I talk to other people in order to learn more about my ethnic group.	.74	.05	17.98
<b><u>Ethnic Identity-Commitment</u></b>			
1. EIC1: I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.	.88	-	-
2. EIC2: I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.	.86	.03	26.62
3. EIC3: I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.	.83	.03	25.30

Model fit ( $\chi^2=28.61$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.000$ ,  $TLI=.98$ ,  $CFI=.99$ ,  $RMSEA=.066$ ).

## APPENDIX F

### SUMMARY OF ANSWERS FOR EACH MEASUREMENT VARIABLE

*Table F1*

*Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (n=594)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
NCSII2	2.10	Most participants disagreed with it being important that others like the products and brands they buy.
NCSII3	2.11	Most participants disagreed with purchasing brands to gain the approval of others when buying products.
NCSII4	1.81	Most participants disagreed with purchasing the brand people they frequently interact with expect them to buy.
NCSII5	2.78	Most participants disagreed with liking to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.
NCSII6	2.14	Most participants disagreed with they achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.
NCSII7	2.08	Most participants disagreed with them trying to buy the same brands as someone they want to be like.
NCSII8	2.09	Most participants disagreed that they purchase the same products and brands to identify with other people.
ICSII2	5.37	Most participants slightly agreed with asking someone they trust about a brand if they have little experience with it.
ICSII3	4.27	Most participants were neutral on gathering information from friends or family before buying a brand.
ICSII4	4.87	Most participants were neutral on consulting other people to help them choose the best brand available.

*Table F2*

*Social Comparison Orientation (n=594)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
SCOA1	2.79	Most participants disagreed with they compare how their loved ones are doing with how others not as close to them are doing.
SCOA2	3.66	Most participants slightly disagreed that they pay a lot of attention to how they do things compared with how others do things.

SCOA3	3.63	Most participants slightly disagreed that they compared what they do with how well others have done in order to assess how well they have done something.
SCOA4	2.90	Most participants disagreed that they compared how they are doing socially with other people.
SCOA5R <sup>a</sup>	3.31	Most participants slightly disagreed that they are the type of person who compares themselves to others.
SCOA6	3.76	Most participants slightly disagreed that they compare themselves with others with respect to what they have accomplished in life.
SCOO1	5.55	Most participants slightly agreed that they like to talk with others who share similar opinions and experiences as them.
SCOO2	5.02	Most participants slightly agreed they try to find out what others in a similar situation as them would do.
SCOO3	5.04	Most participants slightly agreed they like to know what others in a similar situation as them would do.
SCOO4	4.63	Most participants were neutral on trying to find out what others think about something they want to learn more about.

<sup>a</sup>Reverse coded item.

*Table F3*

*Status Consumption (n=594)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
SC1	2.19	Most participants disagreed they buy a product just because it has status.
SC2	2.59	Most participants disagreed they are interested in new products with status.
SC3	2.83	Most participants disagreed they pay more for a product if it has status.
SC4R <sup>a</sup>	3.04	Most participants slightly disagreed that the status of a product is irrelevant to them.
SC5	3.04	Most participants slightly disagreed they think products with some snob appeal are valuable.

<sup>a</sup>Reverse coded item.

*Table F4**Desire for Unique Consumer Products (n=594)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
DUCP1	4.88	Most participants were neutral about being attracted to rare objects.
DUCP2	4.04	Most participants were neutral on being a fashion leader rather than a fashion follower.
DUCP3	3.73	Most participants slightly disagreed that they tend to buy a product if it is scarce.
DUCP4	4.20	Most participants were neutral on preferring to have things custom-made than to have them ready-made.
DUCP5	4.60	Most participants were neutral on enjoying having things that others do not.
DUCP6	3.71	Most participants slightly disagreed that they do not pass up the opportunity to order custom features on the products they buy.
DUCP7	3.76	Most participants slightly disagreed with them trying new products and services before others do.
DUCP8	4.39	Most participants were neutral on shopping at stores that carry merchandise which is different and unusual.

*Table F5**Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings (n=594)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
HPPBM1	3.53	Most participants slightly disagreed they tend to buy products with a trademark on the outside.
HPPBM2	3.09	Most participants slightly disagreed they prefer products with a trademark on the outside.
HPPBM3	3.09	Most participants slightly disagreed they prefer the trademark to be on the outside of the products they buy rather than inside.
LPPBM1	4.40	Most participants were neutral on tending to buy products with unique design features.
LPPBM2	4.28	Most participants were neutral on preferring products with unique design features on the outside.
NPPBM1 <sup>a</sup>	4.49	Most participants were neutral on them not buying products with a trademark or unique design features on the outside.
NPPBM2 <sup>a</sup>	4.86	Most participants were neutral on not wearing or carrying apparel and accessories with trademarks or unique design features.



NPPBM3 <sup>a</sup>	5.23	Most participants slightly agreed that they do not purchase products from companies that use trademarks or unique design features.
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<sup>a</sup>Reverse coded item.

*Table F6*

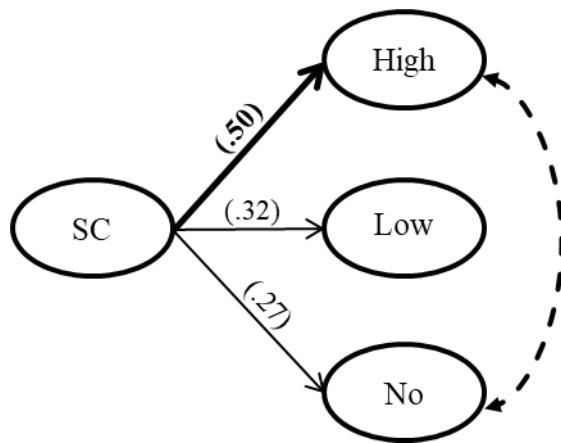
*Ethnic Identity (n=594)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
EIE1	5.34	Most participants slightly agreed they spent time trying to find out more about their ethnic group.
EIE2	5.55	Most participants slightly agreed they do things to help them understand their ethnic background better.
EIE3	5.34	Most participants slightly agreed they talk to other people in order to learn more about their ethnic group.
EIC1	5.94	Most participants slightly agreed they have a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic group.
EIC2	6.08	Most participants agreed they understand pretty well what their ethnic group memberships mean to them.
EIC3	6.05	Most participants agreed they feel a strong attachment towards their ethnic group.

## APPENDIX G

### POST-HOC REGRESSION ANALYSES ON CONSUMER PREFERENCE FOR PROMINENT BRAND MARKINGS

Regression Analysis of Relationship between Status Consumption and Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings (H5)



Regression Analysis of Relationship between Desire for Unique Consumer Products and Consumer Preference for Prominent Brand Markings (H6)

